

# THE YOUNG CONTINENTALS AT MONMOUTH

JOHN T. MCINTYRE







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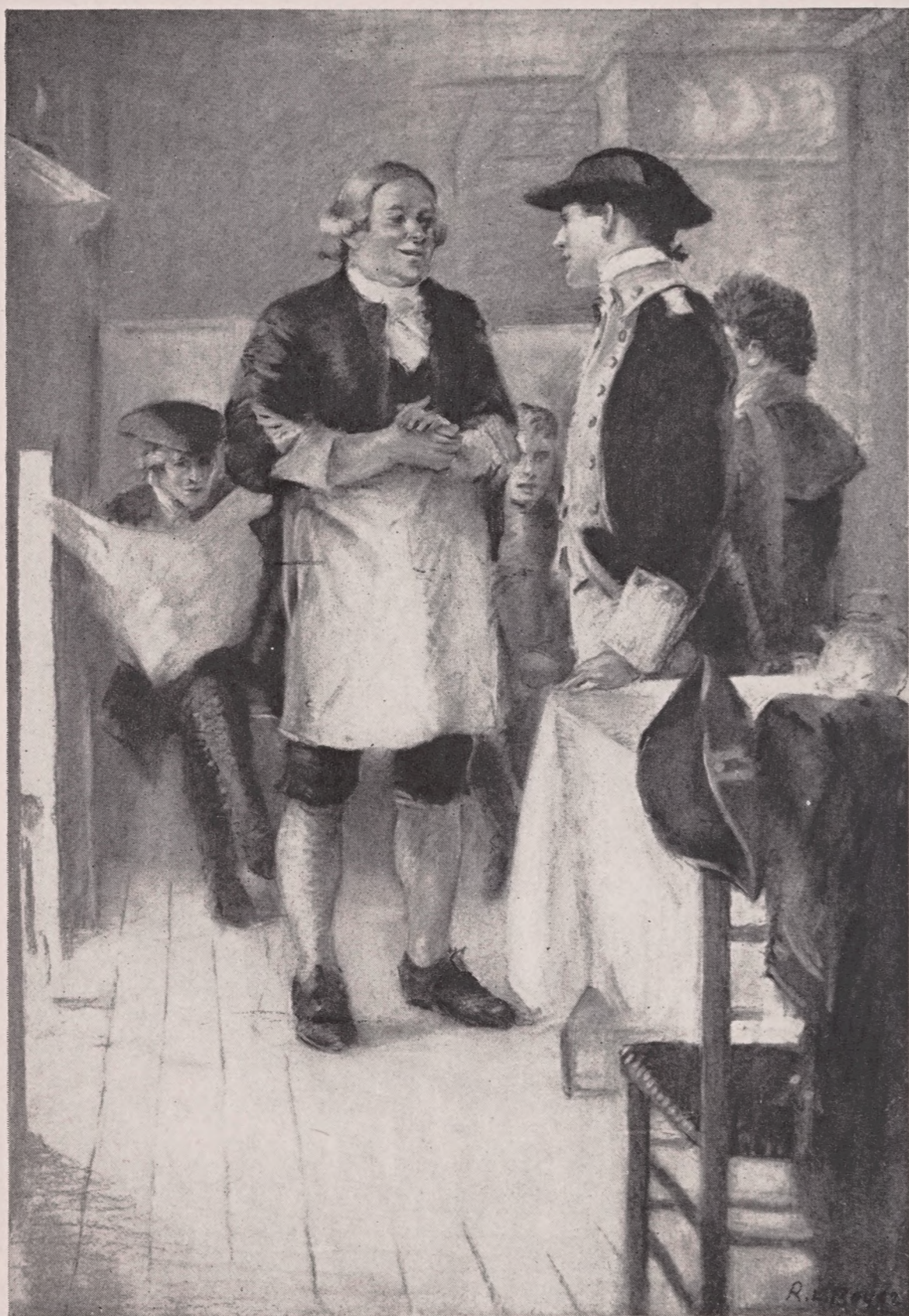












*"WILL YOU HAVE SUPPER"*



# The Young Continental at Monmouth

*by*  
John T. McIntyre  
*Author of*

"The Young Continental at Lexington"  
"The Young Continental at Bunker Hill"  
"The Young Continental at Trenton"



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## Introduction

FOUR sturdy young members of the Continental Army are the chief characters in this story. Ben Cooper and Nat Brewster were from Pennsylvania. Ezra Prentiss and his twin brother George were from Massachusetts. "The Young Continentals at Lexington," the first book of the series, was chiefly concerned with the adventures of Nat Brewster, although all of the four had a part in the stirring events in and around Boston at the beginning of the struggle for the independence of the American Colonies. They were all employed as couriers attached to headquarters, and carried messages for Warren and Putnam, and later for the great general-in-chief, Washington. The second story, "The Young Continentals at Bunker Hill," told of the part played by Ezra Prentiss, assisted by his friends, and the third story, "The Young Continentals at Trenton," described some of the good services rendered by George Prentiss. This book tells the story



of Ben Cooper at Princeton and in the dark period of Brandywine and Valley Forge, and ends with the victory at Monmouth, when Washington overcame not only his open enemies, but "they of his own household."

All four books are true pictures of the days when even boys showed that they could be good patriots, and set an example of loyal, modest, faithful service that thousands of American boys are still glad to follow.



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The Young Continentals at Monmouth.







# The Young Continentals at Monmouth

## CHAPTER I

TELLS HOW MR. TOBIAS HAWKINS MADE THE  
ACQUAINTANCE OF MR. SAMUEL LIVINGSTONE

“Do you know what to-morrow will be, Ben Cooper?”

The speaker was a dwarfish looking lad whose big head and upstanding crest of hair gave him a most curious appearance.

“To-morrow,” replied the second boy, promptly, “will be New Year’s day.”

The dwarf shifted his leather belt so that his huge service pistol might hang more comfortably ; and his voice, when he spoke again, contained a note of complaint.

“It will be that, to be sure ; but it will also be just one week since Washington crossed the Delaware and beat the Hessians.”

The eyes of the other boy sparkled.



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"Ah, that was the night," he cried. "There, indeed, was sport, excitement and glory."

The dwarf shook his large head.

"For you and for Nat and the others," protested he. "But not for me. While you were all having your fill of fighting, I was away in Philadelphia, riding here and there, at the beck and call of a parcel of excited committeemen."

Ben Cooper's good-natured face was all a-wrinkle with smiles.

"Don't worry, Porcupine," he said. "The war is not over as yet, by a good deal. They say Cornwallis is on his way across the Jerseys, and as he's the best fighter the British have, we may expect plenty of warm work still."

It was late in the afternoon; the pale wintry sun was dipping slowly toward the cluster of peaked roofs which marked the location of Philadelphia; the snow-packed road with its topping of ice went stretching ahead like a gleaming serpent.

"We will reach there before sundown," said Ben, his eye upon the housetops as though marking the sun's position. "And I



trust that we find Mr. Morris at home, for I fancy that the general's dispatches are somewhat urgent."

"The general's dispatches to Mr. Robert Morris are always urgent," said the Porcupine. "I have carried more than one of them, and I know. And I have carried them for other officers and gentlemen in and out of the army."

"Merchant Morris seems a most important person," smiled Ben.

The Porcupine brushed his crest of hair more stiffly erect than ever.

"Is it any wonder that he is?" said he. "I don't know much about the ways of people of quality, but I do know that without Master Morris there would be little money with which to feed and pay the troops."

"He is very rich, I hear."

"I have heard so too. And then, again, I have heard that he has not much more than enough."

Ben nodded.

"But," said he, "he has the power to raise funds. He seems to know by instinct the way to hidden hordes. And somehow, he



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knows the magic word which causes the hoarders to unlock the treasure chests. Congress, I think, has much to thank Merchant Morris for."

Ben touched his horse with the spur, and it responded instantly. It was a clean built animal whose small head and slim, powerful legs indicated Arab blood. The Porcupine's mount was a tall, raw-boned beast, sway-backed and with a wicked eye; but it evidently had bottom, for with a long, awkward stride it easily kept him at the side of his friend.

As they entered the suburbs, the drifted road gave way to the clearer streets; and when they entered the city proper, they found Second Street bare of snow, but with stones ice-coated and glistening.

"Front Street will not be so bad," spoke Ben; "there is never so much traffic there, and the snow will still be untrodden."

They turned Sassafras Street and into Front; and when nearing Arch they caught the gleam of arms and uniforms, and saw the townspeople scurrying along as though attracted by something unusual. When they



reached the market-place at the foot of High Street, the two boys saw the reason for this. Along Front Street was drawn a force of Continental troops, and under their watchful eyes was a rabble of unshaven, tattered, dispirited looking men to the number of several thousands.

“Hello,” spoke the Porcupine, surprisedly, as he looked over the heads of the crowd from the back of his tall steed; “and who are these?”

“Our friends, the Hessians, captured at Trenton,” replied Ben Cooper. “I heard that the greater part of them were being sent westward to Lancaster or York for safe keeping. And they seem to have just reached Philadelphia.”

The ragged wretches stood in long lines, gazing stupidly at their captors and at the curious throngs. And that these could be the mercenaries who had spread terror through the Jerseys seemed impossible.

A perky looking little man, standing upon tiptoe to get a glimpse of the captives, exclaimed in a high-pitched, astonished voice:

“And are these really the hirelings of



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whom we have heard so much! Why, they look like common vagabonds."

A plethoric gentleman in a huge waistcoat and steel buckles seemed to grow even more expansive with indignation.

"The idea," he panted. "The bare idea of such vermin spreading fear through an entire state. And the idea of our statesmen and our generals and our soldiers permitting it."

The perky man nodded and settled back upon his heels.

"What you say, sir, is proper and correct," agreed he. "I am quite amazed that such a condition of affairs has been permitted to continue for so long."

"A lot of scurvy ruffians," stated the plethoric gentleman, wrathfully. "A gathering of mean, low fellows without a shred of ambition, or the slightest appearance of manly bearing. You do well, sir," to the perky gentleman, "to be amazed. No such thing would have been permitted in any other nation under the sun."

Ben glanced at the Porcupine, and his good-humored eyes were filled with laughter.

"It is easy to see," said he, "that neither of



our friends here has been where the Hessians ranged with their muskets in their hands. These," and he nodded toward the wretched array of foreigners, "do present an uncommonly ill-favored appearance; but properly uniformed, officered and armed, they were as formidable troops as were in all of Howe's army."

Close at the elbow of the plethoric gentleman stood a tall man with prominent features and great square shoulders. He was richly dressed and carried himself with the air of a person of consequence.

"Sir," said he to the stout man, "what you have just said I agree with as heartily as our friend here," bowing to the perky man. "It is a shame and a scandal that our army should have allowed these wretched Dutchmen to hold them so long in check. To be sure," and he gestured with one hand in a scornful fashion, "they have been beaten and taken. But it should have happened long ago. It should have been done promptly and out of hand. It would seem to me," confidentially, "that our military leaders are not all that they should be."



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"Sir," said the other, "you have expressed my sentiments precisely. I could not have spoken them in more fitting terms. Our officers are not what they should be. They are far from it, as they have proven a dozen times, since the fighting began at New York."

"Congress is at fault," spoke the perky man. "They should see to it that we are provided with competent gentlemen to conduct our military enterprises."

The plethoric gentleman seemed to agree with this statement unqualifiedly. But the tall man shook his head.

"Congress," said he, "is a much harassed body. It has a great deal to do, and no great amount of experience to guide it. But for the greater part it does very well indeed. There are gentlemen belonging to it," with a lowered tone, and a series of knowing nods, "who would readily replace a certain person if they could."

The plethoric one contented himself with puffing his cheeks and assuming a look of much sagacity. It was the perky man who spoke.



"I have heard," said he, his head at one side, like that of an inquisitive bird, "that Washington is not greatly in favor with some of the members of Congress. Of course," and the inquisitive cock of the head grew more pronounced, "it is he you mean."

But the tall man closed his lips tightly, and shook his head after the manner of one who disliked committing himself. It was the stout man who spoke.

"The naming of names," said he, with heavy wisdom, "is sometimes to be avoided; and this is one of the times. Gentlemen can carry on an intelligent conversation without placing themselves on record in matters of delicacy; and in this way important matters can be kept from becoming things of common gossip."

Properly rebuked, the perky man gave his attention once more to the captive mercenaries, while the speaker continued, addressing the tall man, in a guarded tone:

"It is a matter of wonderment with me how people can have so little consideration as to discuss private matters of state in the hearing of every Tom, Dick and Harry. It is



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an almost criminal propensity, believe me, sir; and I always discountenance it when I have the opportunity."

The other nodded, with gravity.

"It is a common failing," said he, "and I have little doubt but what it has occasioned more trouble in the public's affairs than any of us have any knowlege of. And I am glad indeed to meet with a gentleman who is so careful of the general weal; it is a rare occasion, sir; more's the pity."

The large man took out a silver snuff-box, his great face growing more mottled than originally; offering the box to the other, he said in a tone of much gratification:

"Sir, I should be exceedingly pleased with your acquaintance."

The tall man took a pinch of the proffered snuff; and as he dusted the remaining grains from his finger-tips, he made reply:

"Sir, you are very good. My name is Hawkins—Tobias Hawkins—and I am lately arrived from Savannah, in Georgia, where I have some shipping enterprises."

"I thank you," said the plethoric man, with ponderous politeness. He took a com-



panionable pinch, restored the box to one of the huge pockets of his waistcoat, and went on: "I am Samuel Livingstone, merchant and trader in West India goods. And it gives me much pleasure, Master Hawkins, to know you."

The two had fallen into a most earnest conversation upon the condition of trade and public affairs when a drum began to tap, and the long lines of American troops and bedraggled Germans fell into column; then at the word of command they went marching away southward.

As the crowd dispersed, Ben Cooper did not immediately turn his horse's head up High Street, as the Porcupine evidently expected him to do; instead, he sat motionless in his saddle watching the retreating forms of Messrs. Samuel Livingstone and Tobias Hawkins. When he did finally give his rein a shake as a signal to his mount, the curious, speculative expression upon his face did not lessen. And as he turned into Second Street once more, he said:

"Do you know, that was a rather queer thing."

The Porcupine had noticed his manner,



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but had made no comment ; now, however, he asked :

“ What do you mean ? ”

“ Why, the conduct of Mr. Tobias Hawkins, as he called himself. Did you notice him ? ”

The dwarf nodded.

“ And rather a wide-awake sort, I thought him,” said he. “ But I did not see anything queer in him. Very even, and much like a gentleman.”

But Ben shook his head.

“ I don't mean in that respect. He appeared to be all you say, but at the same time there was a something —— ” he paused as though uncertain for a moment, then went on with thoughtful face. “ To all appearance his meeting with Merchant Livingstone was pure accident.”

The Porcupine opened his eyes wide.

“ What ? ” demanded he. “ And was it not so ? ”

“ I think not,” replied Ben. “ Rather, I am inclined to believe that it was a cunningly devised plan. I scarcely know what makes me think so, but Hawkins purposed making acquaintance of Mr. Livingstone before he



spoke to him ; and so expertly did he contrive matters that he's made it appear that it was Mr. Livingstone who sought him."

"Why, it may be so," said the dwarf. "These traders have very curious ways, I've heard. But, in any event, it makes no difference. We are not at all interested in their doings."

"I don't know," said young Cooper, gravely. "If the matter which Mr. Hawkins has in mind is commercial, of course we are not ; but," and he turned his head as though to get a fresh sight of the gentlemen in question, "if it is something else, perhaps it may turn out that we are."



## CHAPTER II

### IN WHICH MR. HAWKINS UTTERS A THREAT

THE Porcupine was still turning over the odd remarks of his companion, when they pulled up at that famous hostelry of Revolutionary days, "The City Tavern." In the inn yard, Ben, looking down from his saddle, inquired of a hostler who had come to take their mounts:

"Can you tell me where Mr. Robert Morris lives?"

"Do you mean the merchant, Morris?" asked the man.

"Yes."

"You will find his house on Chestnut Street, near to Seventh," directed the man.

They dismounted, and saw to it that their horses would be cleaned, fed and bedded; after this they went into the tavern and bespoke lodgings for themselves.

"And will you have supper also, gentle-



men?" smiled the landlord. "Piping hot it will be, the very sort for a damp, chilly evening like this. Taken in a snug, warm room, I can conceive of nothing more inviting."

Ben laughed. He and the landlord were old acquaintances, and the lad knew his ways.

"Why," spoke Ben, "if your supper and your rooms were only half as enticing as your manner of speaking of them, they would be the most desired things in all Philadelphia. However, we will put both of them to the test in a very little while. I have a message to deliver, and then we shall try whether or no you can prove what you say."

In a very short time Ben, having left the Porcupine behind, arrived at the house of Robert Morris and sounded the heavy brass knocker. A thin-shouldered woman in a white cap came to the door and replied to his questions.

"No," she said, "Mr. Morris is not at home. Indeed, he will not be home until late, by all accounts, for I've heard it said that he'll sup to-night at one of the taverns with some friends."



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"My business is important," said Ben. "Can you tell me at which of the taverns he will be?"

But the woman shook her head.

"No," she said. "I am sorry, young gentleman, but I cannot."

Ben considered for a moment.

"Will you oblige me with a pen full of ink and a slip of paper?" he asked.

Thereupon the woman invited him to walk in; in the wide hall he was provided with the desired articles, and so wrote a few lines explaining who he was and the nature of his errand. The note he gave to the woman.

"I shall return between this and midnight," he said. "Mr. Morris will, no doubt, have returned by then."

"Oh, yes, sir," replied the woman, earnestly. "He will be sure to be home by then. And I will give him your message as soon as he comes."

The evening was a brisk one; the moon was coming up clearly, the air was tingling with cold, and the lad's spurs jangled upon the flags as he stepped buoyantly along.

"This is the sort of weather that makes one



feel like undertaking some enterprise," he told himself, his spirits rising with every step he took. "If it is the same in the neighborhood of Trenton, I should not be surprised to shortly hear that the general has set out again upon another venture against the British."

He stepped jauntily into the coffee room of the tavern; the candles were lighted, the curtains were drawn at the small paned windows and a heap of logs crackled in a huge fireplace. Before this sat the Porcupine upon a stool, his short legs crossed one upon another and deeply engaged in a conversation with—of all persons in the world—Mr. Tobias Hawkins.

Mr. Hawkins stood with one foot upon the fender, and one elbow upon the mantel; he looked very stalwart and very handsome as he gazed laughingly down at the dwarf, and seemed very much amused at something which the latter had said.

"And so," remarked he, to the high admiration of some serving maids, and other attachés of the inn, "you are a patriot, are you?"

"I am," replied the Porcupine, as cool as



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you please, "and I try to act up to the way I think."

"Excellent!" cried Mr. Hawkins. "Excellent, indeed! A patriot who tries to put his opinions into acts! Why, this is a prodigy! If all patriots were of your kidney, my fine fellow, belike we'd have more deeds than words." He ran his fingers through his coarse, luxuriant hair, and his eye challenged the mirth of a few guests supping at the round tables. "But come," he added, "let us hear what form your actions took."

"What other form could they take but good blows?" quoth the Porcupine, sagely. "What other form would be understood in these times but hard knocks?"

The mirth of Hawkins filled the room; the titters of the servant maids and the grins of the waiters showed their entertainment; broad smiles were on the faces of the guests who had heard the dwarf's words.

"And do you mean to tell me that you delivered the good blows you speak of?" demanded Hawkins. "And the hard knocks? Surely, the foe must have trembled when he saw you preparing for the fight."



"If inches won battles, then the British would never lose one," stated the Porcupine, calmly. "Their beef-eaters are each as big as two men." With a comical gesture he hitched his belt about and brought the huge pistol which he still carried into plain view. "The little fellow can shoot as straight as the big one," he added; "and, sometimes, better."

"Ah," said Tobias Hawkins, and he stared with interest at the weapon, which he now apparently noted for the first time. "I see." There was a pause during which he examined the dwarf with amused unbelief; then he inquired: "And where, may I be permitted to ask, has the excellence of your aim been called into play?"

"At Lexington," replied the Porcupine, with never a wrinkle of his countenance; "also at Bunker Hill; and again in some less important affairs about the town of Boston."

There was something about the simplicity of this answer that drove the smiles from the faces turned toward the speaker. The unbelieving amusement in the face of Hawkins, however, remained.

"I see," said he, "that you are a person



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who has seen service. Mayhap, you were also a partaker in the matter at Trenton, a few weeks ago."

"I had no such good luck," replied the Porcupine, moodily. "By all right I should have been there; but some folks need a great deal of scurrying to keep them at rest, and so I must be riding here and there for them, delivering letters filled with nothing when I might have been of some real service beyond the river."

There was no laughter or grinning at this; even Hawkins seemed to have concluded that he had exhausted the dwarf's humorous possibilities, for he yawned and said:

"Ah, well, you take yourself seriously enough, I'll say that for you, my lad. But, then, it is as well that you do so, for you'll find as you progress through life that others will not go far out of their way to do the like." And with this the man turned away, calling to the host: "Landlord, have not my friends arrived?"

"No, Mr. Hawkins, not yet, sir. It is a trifle early, I think. You said eight o'clock, and it is not much after seven."



Hawkins looked at a huge silver watch and replaced it in his pocket with a frown. Ben noticed this with a smile.

“Some,” thought the lad, “to have noted him a few moments ago, would have fancied him a chap of rare wit and good nature. But it was only while trying to hold up another to ridicule. Now that the point of his wit has been turned, he is ill-tempered enough.”

Hawkins paced the floor of the coffee room impatiently. Ben and the Porcupine ordered and ate their supper at a table near the fire.

“A beefsteak pie,” remarked the dwarf, “is a dish not to be ill considered. I know of nothing that affords a hungry stomach more satisfaction.”

Ben watched the blaze dart up the huge throat of the chimney; the logs crackled and the fire roared; the boy stretched his booted legs out toward it with a sigh.

“After a long day on the road,” said he, “the fire is as good as the food. And,” with a glance around, “the room is as satisfying as either.”

It was some little time since they had sat down to their meal, and quite a number of persons had come and gone. So when Ben



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cast his eyes about it is not at all surprising that he should notice some of the newcomers. Suddenly he sat erect.

"Hello!" said he.

"What now?" asked the Porcupine.

"I see that one of Mr. Hawkins' friends has arrived."

The dwarf screwed his head around so that he might see; and when he had done so he whistled lowly.

"Merchant Livingstone!" said he. "So they are to sup together."

"Friend Hawkins does not lag in the matter of clinching his friendships," smiled Ben. "Look at him. One would fancy that he'd been in touch with the other all his life."

The two mentioned were seated at a table no great distance away; their heads were bent close together, and Hawkins was speaking earnestly and in a rather lowered voice.

"Of course," he said, "it would not do, as I already remarked to-day, to speak too openly upon certain subjects. But they can be discussed guardedly and with circumspection, and so do no general harm."

"Yes, yes," said Mr. Livingstone, eagerly.



"I understand and thoroughly appreciate your standpoint. But," and his head went nearer to that of his new friend, "are there actually steps being taken to—to oust, so to speak—a certain person?"

Hawkins waved one large, well-kept hand.

"My dear sir," said he, "it is entirely too early to expect such definite things as 'steps' in the matter. At most, it is but under consideration."

"Ah, I see." Mr. Livingstone nodded his head wisely. "No steps have been taken, but the matter is being considered." There was a pause of a few moments, then he added with a resumption of his former eagerness: "Can you tell me, is the thing being well considered?"

Hawkins shook his head gravely.

"That is all I can say at this time. The matter came to me quite in the way of an accident, and I passed my word as a gentleman to keep silent regarding it."

"To be sure, to be sure," said Merchant Livingstone, hastily. "And quite right, too, sir. It were best that the utmost privacy be exercised in such things."



The speaker sat staring ponderously, straight before him, his great face solemn and approving. There was a silence between them and it was Hawkins who finally broke it.

"You were to have a friend to sup with you, were you not?"

"Two of them," answered Livingstone. "That is why I so strongly urged you to come. I desired you to meet them, for they are persons of consequence in Philadelphia—yes, and in the nation, too, for the matter of that."

Hawkins nodded, but said nothing. Ben watching him, curiously, saw an expectant look in his eyes.

"However," continued Merchant Livingstone, "only one of them will attend. But he is a fine fellow, and I'm sure you will be delighted with him."

"Who is it?" asked Hawkins.

At this moment there was a clatter of crockery at the far side of the coffee room, one of the waiters having met with a mishap. Ben could not catch the name spoken by the fat merchant, but Hawkins apparently heard it, for his face lit up suddenly; and for an



instant the boy felt sure there was exultation in his eyes.

“Why,” said the man, and his tones showed only mild interest, “I am quite charmed. I did not expect to meet so famous a personage during my stay in your city.”

“I have many friends, both in commercial and public life,” said the fat merchant, complacently. “And before you leave for the South I shall take much pleasure in presenting you to them.”

Here followed a great deal of talk regarding Mr. Livingstone’s friends; Ben, as he idly listened, noted that now and then the interest of Hawkins was aroused at the mention of certain names; but for the most part the man made no sign.

All this time the Porcupine, who sat with his back to the two men, had been studying Ben. And when he noted a flagging of the latter’s interest, he spoke.

“It seems to me,” said he, “that you have been mightily taken by those two.”

Ben smiled good-humoredly; and yet there was a grave expression in his eyes.

“By one of them only,” he corrected.



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"And that is Master Hawkins," said the dwarf.

Ben nodded.

"But why?" asked the other, curiously. "Have you ever seen him before to-day? What has he done that you should be so interested in him?"

Ben made no reply for a few moments; and when he did speak his voice was low and troubled.

"I don't know just why I am so interested in him," he replied. "I have never seen him before to-day; and it is not anything which he has done which attracts me; it is," vaguely, "what he may be about to do."

The Porcupine looked astonished.

"What he may be about to do," repeated he. "Well, now we have a dealing in mysteries, indeed! And what do you think he may be about to do?"

But Ben Cooper shook his head.

"I don't know. It is not definite enough for me to give it a name. I have a sort of presentiment that harm is to come through him; that is all I can make out of it."

The dwarf sat in silence, trying to under-



stand this. He brushed his stiff crest of hair more erect, wrinkled his brows and stared at his friend; but, apparently, he could make nothing of it all. And while he was so engaged a somewhat stout man, with a round face and shrewd eyes, came into the coffee room. It was the landlord who hastened forward to relieve him of his cloak and three cornered hat.

"Hah!" said the round-faced man as he stamped upon the hearth to warm his feet, "it keeps cold, landlord." He unwound a great length of woolen comforter from about his neck and then rubbed his hands briskly together before the blaze. "But then, what else would we have for a New Year's Eve?"

Seemingly the gentleman was the one whom Merchant Livingstone expected, for that honest man greeted him warmly and presented Hawkins. Again in the whirl of words did Ben lose the name.

"I am right glad to meet Master Hawkins," said the newcomer. "I do not recollect any one in Savannah of the name with whom my firm has had dealings; but then," with a laugh, "I do not profess to recall them all."



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"We have never had the pleasure of any transactions with your house, sir," said Tobias Hawkins, smoothly. "Our trade is mostly importations from the islands, and gulf points. Spanish goods, and Portuguese, too, we import in foreign bottoms, for such are largely demanded by the ports along the gulf and south coast."

Their supper was served to them, and the three fell to with hearty appetites; but the meal had not progressed far when Master Livingstone again fell to talking politics.

"I cannot express my gratification," he said, "at seeing so excellent a patriot as our friend Hawkins coming from so youthful a province as Georgia. It shows, it seems to me, that the spark of patriotism is wide-spread; and this being the case, it cannot but help gaining headway as time goes on."

The round-faced gentleman nodded.

"That," said he, "is my own way of looking at it. And patriotism alone is what will keep the war against tyranny moving. It will fill the ranks of the army, it will provide money to pay the troops, it will keep competent commanders in the field."



Master Livingstone glanced at Tobias Hawkins, and that gentleman nodded his head and pursed up his lips. What he meant by this was an enigma, but to the mind of the fat merchant, it was simple enough.

“Ah,” said that worthy, “in that last remark you put your finger upon the vital point of this struggle, sir. Pure patriotism alone will supply competent commanders to lead our troops. But the patriots should be careful. They should make sure that the commanders fixed upon are competent.”

For a moment there was a silence; then the round-faced man said :

“There is a tang to your voice, Neighbor Livingstone, that would lead one to suppose that you doubt the ability of the army’s leaders.”

For a moment the other merchant stammered; his great face became mottled with agitation; and when he finally found his tongue, he said :

“Of course, I have no military skill, and do not profess to be a judge of these matters. But there are many who are complaining;



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and there are not a few who openly say that we should have a change."

The other nodded, and settled his napkin more comfortably under his chin.

"A change?" said he. "Oh, yes, there are a great many who are crying for that. But who are they, sir? Answer me." He glanced at the other two as though challenging them to reply. Livingstone in turn glanced at Hawkins, and as that gentleman gave no sign, he, also, remained mute. The speaker tasted delicately of the dish before him, then pointing his fork at the silent twain, proceeded:

"Since you don't seem able to answer, I will do so for you. The thing had its beginning with a parcel of knaves who thought to line their pockets out of the public funds; and later they were joined by disappointed officers whose preferment had been discounted by General Washington because he knew them for what they were."

Master Livingstone coughed apologetically; it were as though he disliked controverting his guest, but felt compelled by facts to do so.

"There is, perhaps, some truth in what you say," said he. "But then, there are many



persons who belong to neither of the classes you mention, who believe the present commander-in-chief to be unfit."

The other made no reply to this, merely gesturing his impatience with such people. His silence seemed to encourage Merchant Livingstone, who went on :

" Now, look the thing candidly in the face, my dear sir, and tell me if you don't think these good folk have some cause for believing as they do. There is the campaign about New York. It is notorious that it was sadly bungled. Long Island would have been won by any far-seeing officer; the affairs on the river and above New York would have proven matters of little effort to many a man who is held idle here in the city. The flight across the Jerseys ——"

But at this the round-faced man lost all patience. He tore his napkin from about his neck and dashed it down upon the table.

" The flight across the Jerseys is precisely on a footing with all the other things you have mentioned or can mention. With a handful of badly armed men, Washington fell back before a disciplined army; at every halt-



ing place he sent appeals for help, and though he was in the most desperate danger, no aid was given him ; though he crossed the entire state, not a hundred militia answered his call." Here the angry gentleman got upon his feet and glared at his adversary. " Did they expect him to give battle with his bare hands ? A commission is not all that an officer requires, sir. He cannot wave it in the face of the enemy and expect them to be seized with fright. He must be given men, sir—men and money ; and unless he is given them, what rational person can expect anything but defeat and retreat ? "

That Mr. Samuel Livingstone was astounded at this outburst was evident. He lifted one fat hand in protest, and said with much emotion :

" My good friend, don't be violent, I beg ! I did not think to offend you, but to merely repeat some things which could not help but reach my ear."

" It does not set well upon a man of your years and station, Livingstone, to repeat common gossip. What has been said to the discredit of General Washington has been said behind his back. Not one of his detractors



has had the courage to speak openly and specifically—that is, not one whom he would think it worth while to controvert. The whole matter is a rascally one, sir, and every worthy person should frown upon it.”

“I meant to give you no offense,” said Master Livingstone.

“And you have not. What I say is said as a citizen, my friend ; and I have no personal feeling in the matter whatever.”

However, when the speaker sat down once more, Ben Cooper noted that his manner was not at all as even as it had been formerly. Apparently he was no lukewarm friend of the commander-in-chief of the American forces, and felt the insinuations leveled against that gentleman much more keenly than he cared to admit.

Livingstone spoke but little after this ; his friend's reception of his views had so abashed him that he seemed to prefer to keep silent. But with Hawkins it was different. With smooth insinuation he entered into the matter under discussion ; he stated no views, but seemed somewhat eager as to the views of others. Ben listened with attention ; now



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and then he noted the man's eye lift in his direction, but as the glances seemed merely passing ones he gave them no heed. After a time the Porcupine spoke.

"Master Hawkins seems very inquisitive," remarked he, shrewdly. "Mark you, how he asks questions."

"And, also, mark you, whom the questions hinge upon," said Ben, with meaning.

Intently the dwarf listened, all the time seeming much interested in the remnants of the beefsteak pie. At last he looked up at Ben, his brows lifted and his mouth drawn to one side, knowingly.

"He wants to know about the people who are speaking ill of General Washington—especially about those officers who think themselves ill-treated." There was a silence, and as Ben said nothing, the dwarf asked: "I wonder why?"

"I, too, wonder why," said Ben, and there was that same speculative look in his face which the Porcupine had noted more than once since their first sight of Tobias Hawkins on the outskirts of the throng which had watched the captive Hessians.



After Mr. Livingstone and his guests had done with their supper, they sat for some time and talked. Hawkins' part in this was still questioning; and always, as the Porcupine had shrewdly noted, questions concerning those who bore General Washington ill will. The clock struck ten as the round-faced man arose.

"I had not thought it so late. You will excuse me, Livingstone, and you, Mr. Hawkins, for leaving you so abruptly. But my time is much taken up these nights; I have much correspondence thrust upon me, and many books to put in order before I sleep."

So saying he called for his cloak, his comforter and three-cornered hat; and shaking hands with his companions he hurried out into the cold streets. It was no great while after this before Hawkins and Livingstone also made up their minds to go; the former stood before the cheerfully blazing fire as he drew on his greatcoat and adjusted his hat; then with his hands upon his hips he turned and stared Ben straight in the eye.

"I trust, young sir, that you will have no difficulty in recognizing me when next we chance to meet."



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Ben was taken by surprise; but he contrived to present a cool front and make reply :

“ I have a habit of remembering faces, sir. And yours,” inspecting the man with much calmness, “ is one not readily forgotten.”

The man favored him with a smile which was not altogether pleasant to see. The good humor of the early evening was now completely gone; his strong features were harsh and hawk-like.

“ Perhaps,” sneered he, “ you, like our young friend here, have been to the wars.” As the boy made no reply, he went on : “ Perhaps a person with good sight might have seen you also at Bunker Hill.”

“ It is possible,” smiled Ben. “ There were a great many there.” He looked steadfastly into the man’s face and continued, intending the saying merely as a jest and that he should not be thought backward with an answer : “ And who knows, sir, but that one with even less excellent vision might have noted you there ? ”

The effect of this upon the man was startling. For an instant he glared like a tiger and his powerful hands clinched.



"Master Hawkins!" cried Samuel Livingstone, alarmed.

The man's countenance cleared like magic; with a wide gesture he burst into a great laugh.

"Don't mind me, sir," cautioned he. "I will have my jest at even the most unseemly of times. But come, I'll not detain you with my clowning." And with that he took the merchant by the arm and started jovially for the door. But upon reaching it he turned and addressed himself to Ben once more.

"I ask your pardon, my lad, for the liberty taken in presuming to have a laugh at your expense. Perhaps," and there was a covert meaning in both his voice and eyes, "we shall meet at some other time. And, if it should so chance, trust me to remember you, even if you should, after all, forget me."

And with that the door closed upon both him and the merchant, and Ben and the Porcupine sat looking into each other's faces.



## CHAPTER III

### SHOWS HOW BEN COOPER STARTED UPON A MISSION IN THE EARLY DAWN

FOR a brief space after the departure of Tobias Hawkins and Merchant Livingstone, Ben Cooper and the Porcupine continued to look inquiringly at each other.

"Well?" said the dwarf, at last.

"Well?" returned Ben, in the same tone, and with that they burst into a laugh.

"An odd fish," commented the Porcupine, crossing one short leg over the other and nodding his head. "An odd fish, indeed. And he seemed to have some sort of a hidden meaning behind his words as he went out."

"A threat," said Ben, thoughtfully; "undoubtedly a threat. He seemed to object to my watching him as I did."

"And the way he started, and the rage he flew into when you joked him about also being at Bunker Hill. It was peculiar."

"And if he was there—and I am, somehow,



now inclined so think he was—why does he desire to keep it hidden? All whom I have met who took part in that fight have been proud of it. Indeed, most have made it a boast.” Ben paused for a moment, deep in thought; then he suddenly leaped up.

“What is it?” cried the Porcupine, all alert, and also rising.

But seeing that he was attracting attention, Ben resumed his seat.

“Sit down,” said he, calmly enough. And when the dwarf had done so, he leaned across the table and continued in a low-pitched voice: “Master Hawkins was present at the Bunker Hill fight. My watching him so intently, and my later jest have convinced him that I saw him there.”

“But,” said the Porcupine, not understanding, “he seemed afraid. Why should he fear you seeing him there?”

“There is only one reason in the world,” replied Ben Cooper, and his voice sank lower than ever, “and that is that he was upon the side of the enemy.”

The Porcupine sank back into his chair; his lips formed a circle, and he blew out his



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breath hissingly. Then with one finger he pointed at Ben and said :

“ You’re right. You’re exactly right. It couldn’t be anything else. He belongs to Howe’s army, and he’s here for no good.”

But Ben was silent ; he too, so it appeared, was convinced that the man’s presence in the city had an evil meaning. And the Porcupine, as he watched his comrade, felt sure that its possible intent suggested itself to him. Ben stared into the fire, his chin in his hands, and the dwarf heard him mutter :

“ No, no ! Such a thing is almost impossible. It might enter the minds of the enemy to attempt it ; but it could not be carried out, for no American would lend himself to it.”

It was some little time before Ben aroused himself.

“ I had almost forgotten Master Morris and the dispatch,” said he as he looked at the coffee room clock. “ You get to bed, Porcupine, for there’s no knowing how long I shall be gone.”

He pulled on his heavy coat, and felt of his inner pockets to be sure that his message was safe ; then with a parting word to the dwarf,



he left the inn. The streets were very quiet at that hour; the stars looked cold and far away; the stones rang under his spurred heel.

There was a light burning behind a curtain in the Morris house.

"He's home, I think," said the lad, "and perhaps sitting up, awaiting my return."

Ben ascended the high stone steps and sounded the knocker gently. There was a pause, then a step was heard in the hall, a bar fell, a chain rattled and the door swung open. To his great astonishment, Ben saw standing before him, a lighted candle above his head, the gentleman who had supped with Livingstone and Hawkins at the inn.

"I desire to see Master Robert Morris," said the lad.

The other inspected him closely.

"Did you, by any chance, call here earlier in the evening?" he asked.

"I did, and left a note saying that I would return."

The door was held open to its fullest extent.

"Come in."

Ben Cooper entered the hall; the other then closed the door and led the way to an apart-



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ment where several candles burned in long silver candlesticks upon a writing table.

"I reached home only a short time ago," said the gentleman, after they had become seated, "and was startled to find myself the cause of delay. The general's dispatches are usually urgent."

Ben took out a folded paper sealed in several places.

"You are Mr. Robert Morris?" he asked.

"I am," replied the gentleman.

Upon receiving the paper he at once broke the seal, and drawing one of the candles nearer, proceeded to read. When he reached the end of the message, his lips were compressed and a troubled expression appeared in his eyes.

"I was afraid it was something like this," he said, shaking his head. "The wants of the army are urgent, I know, but money is very difficult to get just now." He looked at Ben and tapped the edge of the refolded paper upon the writing table. "It is a matter of wonderment what becomes of the hard money at times," he went on. "When it is the most urgently needed, it is the scarcest."



“That,” said Ben, “I think may be said about most things.”

The financier of the Revolution smiled.

“Why,” said he, “that’s true enough. But money is the worst of all. Let me see.” The speaker pulled open a drawer and took out a book. “What were the last moneys I sent to the general?” He turned page after page, running his finger down each.

“Here it is,” pausing at an entry. “There were four hundred and ten Spanish dollars, two crowns, ten shillings and sixpence English, and one French half-crown.” He closed the ledger and sat regarding it with nodding head. “A small sum, indeed, to supply a general in the field; it could not go far.” He was silent for a space; then he opened the message once more, and reread what Washington had written. “This time such a pittance will not answer. The call is more urgent; a large sum must be had. But,” and his chin sank upon his breast, “where shall I ask for it? Where has my credit not been tried?”

For a long time he sat buried in thought, apparently oblivious of the boy’s presence. Finally he arose and began pacing up and



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down the apartment, his hands behind him and his brows puckered thoughtfully. One, two, three hours were struck upon the great bell in the State House tower; Ben was nodding in the comfortable chair which had been given him; the financier, with muttering lips and mind concentrated upon the problem before him, continued his pacing. At three o'clock he sat down and began to go through documents, books and files; with a blunt quill he scratched notes upon a slip of paper. It was past four o'clock when he pushed the mass from him and arose; twice had he replaced the candles, and the last were now guttering and flickering in the sockets of their supports. Mr. Morris was putting on his cloak when his eyes fell upon the relaxed form of the drowsy youth.

"My poor lad," he said, astonishment and then amusement showing in his face, "I had really forgotten all about you. It is too bad of me, but I was so taken up by these affairs of mine that everything else was completely shut out."

Ben rubbed his eyes.

"I was told to await an answer," he said; "and believe me, sir, I have passed a much



longer and less comfortable time often enough and upon less important business."

"You are very good to say so," replied the merchant. He took up his hat, and in the act of placing it upon his head, a thought seemed to occur to him. "Perhaps," he added, "you are not even yet too fatigued to prolong your share in this matter."

"Sir," replied Ben Cooper, arising and lifting a hand, military fashion, "I am ready and willing to give what time you require to it."

"Very good," said Mr. Morris, nodding his head in a satisfied way. "You have the making of an excellent soldier in you, sir."

After settling the long comforter about his neck, the merchant went to a low chest of drawers and took from it a pistol.

"I trust you are armed," said he, as he examined this. Without a word Ben showed the pistol and short hanger which he wore buttoned under his greatcoat. "Good," said Mr. Morris. "If I have fortune attending me, I shall have a large sum in hard money before very long; and it will be as well to be prepared to defend it against highwaymen, if any be abroad."



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Without any clear understanding of the nature of this errand, Ben Cooper followed the comfortable looking Mr. Morris into the street; the dawn was paling the sky in the direction of the Delaware, and the air had a penetrating chill which made him shiver. Not very far did they go before Mr. Morris ascended a pair of steps and beat a tattoo upon the knocker.

"You will be a much astonished man, Jethro Sharpless," chuckled the merchant, "and there will be many like you before the dawn comes up on the New Year."

In reply to the vigorous rapping upon the door, a window went up, a head popped out and a complaining voice demanded:

"Who is it that comes at such an hour as this? Be off with thee or I will summon the watch and have thee taken to the lock-up."

"Is that you, Jethro Sharpless?" asked Merchant Morris. "This is your friend Robert Morris, who bids you come down as soon as you may and hear what news is come from the Jerseys."

There was an exclamation above, and the window closed hastily. The announcement by Mr. Morris was in a clear, round voice and





*"THIS IS YOUR FRIEND  
ROBERT MORRIS"*







in the quiet of the early morning it carried surprisingly. From across the way an anxious voice called :

“What news is it that you bring, Neighbor Morris? Good or bad?”

“Ah, did my knocking awaken you, Robert Chaney? Arouse you, then!” Mr. Morris had his face toward the place where the voice had sounded.

Apparently the rat-tat-tat upon the door of Friend Sharpless had brought others out of their warm beds to learn what was going forward. At any rate there came a full half dozen voices from as many different points, all charged with suspense :

“What say you, Morris? What is it?”

“Has a battle been fought?”

“Has Cornwallis crossed a state so soon?”

“How went the fight?”

“Did our troops give a good account of themselves?”

But Robert Morris offered them scant satisfaction.

“You will have to gather round about, my good friends, before I relieve myself of my budget. I have news of the first importance



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—news that must come home to every real friend of the cause.” Here the door of the Sharpless house opened, and the nightcapped householder showed himself, candle in hand. “You will find me in the parlor of Jethro Sharpless; and any of you, who care to hear what General Washington himself says, will gather there at once.”

In the parlor, Mr. Sharpless, who was a tall, bony man, with scraggy, gray brows, placed his brass candlestick upon the table and looked at the two who had so disturbed his sleep.

“News from the Jerseys,” said he, his scraggy brows drawn together with anxiety. “And what has been toward, Friend Morris? Has there been a swording and a bickering with the guns? Or has the army retreated once more?”

Mr. Morris took a seat at one corner of a settle, crossed his legs and balanced his three-cornered hat in his hands.

“I fancy,” said he, quietly, “there will be a number of your neighbors here in a few moments, Friend Sharpless; so, perhaps, we had better save the news until they arrive.”



With as good a grace as may be, the householder set about waiting; and in no great while Mr. Morris was surrounded by a ring of eager faces.

"Come now, the news," was demanded of him.

"Never say it was anything but a victory," said a second.

"Trenton has but whetted our appetite," declared another. "Americans can beat the British as readily as they can the Hessians, so let's to the news of how they did it."

Merchant Morris regarded them with his shrewd eyes. He knew every man of them; they were persons of means and circumstance; none in the entire city more capable than they when matters of credit or ready money were discussed.

"So," spoke Mr. Morris, carefully, "you desire a victory, do you, my friends? Very good. Not one of you is more desirous of it than I. And no one more willing to point out to you how it can be gotten than I."

"What," demanded Friend Sharpless, "has there not been a fight won, then?"

"A fight won!" replied Robert Morris,



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scornfully. "A fight won! And with what, pray?" He looked from one to the other of them. "Would you ask a man to dig and give him no spade? Would you require a man to build and provide him with no bricks? You would not! You are all too shrewd for that—too well acquainted with the wisdom of practical things. But still you would have a general win battles without an army; you would have him face the ice of winter without shoes or blankets for his scanty force; you would have him keep the field in all the rigor of the season with no medical help for his sick; you would have him front a powerful foe with only a few muskets and artillery of the poorest."

To this there was no answer, save a look of gloom from each of the circle. Robert Morris went on :

"You have the cause and you have the general. Put the power into the general's hands, and the cause is won." There was a pause, and the speaker drew out the dispatch which Ben Cooper had brought from Trenton. "It is, perhaps, in your minds," proceeded the financier, "as to what form this paper is to take. My reply is



simple. Funds! Hard money! I do not expect you to fill the empty treasure chest. Merely cover its bottom and it will suffice for a time."

"Times," spoke one with a shake of the head, "are hard."

"Ready money is difficult to come by," added another.

"The war has ruined trade," bemoaned another. "A gold or silver coin is a rarity nowadays."

"Here," said Robert Morris, apparently paying no heed to their complaints, "is the letter of His Excellency." He read the lines with proper emphasis and clearness, and as he was refolding the sheet continued: "You see, sirs, it is a rather large sum that is required; but consider, also, that the need of it is much larger still. A crisis has been reached in the country's affairs that must be met with swiftness and generosity; if it is not, then never look for a sign of peace until all the sources of supply whatsoever have been drained. By lending a part to the cause at this time, you may save the whole, eventually."

He placed the dispatch in his pocket and



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sat awaiting a response. There was a long silence: each man seemed to prefer that his neighbor speak first. There was none of the eagerness of real patriotism which once impelled men to rush to the defense of their native land; their manners were more like those of gloomy pessimists who foresaw nothing but disaster and whose remembrance of self impelled them to think only of what might be saved from the ruins of their cause. Keen-eyed Robert Morris perceived this at once; it was nothing more, apparently, than he had expected; but like the courageous man that he was, he continued to strive, even in the face of defeat.

Picture after picture was drawn by him of what would befall should the army not receive the required money; he left nothing to the imagination; Washington would be driven beyond the western mountains; Philadelphia would fall; taxation would hang upon them like a chain upon a felon.

But his eloquence failed to move them; their heavy faces ringed about him unbelievably; the doubt in their hearts seemed to fill the room. At length Morris arose.



"Well," said he, "I cannot remain to reason with you longer, friends. The money must be had swiftly, if it's to do any good; so I must call upon some one more promising before it is too late. Should any of you chance to alter your minds," he added, pausing at the door, "you know where I live. I shall be very glad, indeed, to see you."

With Ben Cooper at his side he left the house of Jethro Sharpless, and proceeded to another house at no great distance; but with no better fortune. Then began a hurried round from house to house, a hammering at knockers and a rousing of quiet citizens from their beds. Excuses, apologies and promises were many.

"But no hard money," said the financier to Ben. "Nothing that will help an army desperately circumstanced for arms and clothing and food."

The dawn had passed, and the streets were well peopled by those starting upon the early duties of the day when Robert Morris with empty hands and haggard face gave up the hopeless task.

"I am ashamed of my fellow townsmen," he said. "They are without a particle of that



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daring necessary to bring a cause to the point where success may be had."

Side by side he and Ben walked back toward the Morris house; the merchant's head was bent, his moody eyes were upon the ground.

"I will write a letter to the general which you will be good enough to carry," he said. "Perhaps in a few days I shall be more fortunate in my appeals for help, and will say so in the letter; if you are asked any questions, it will be as well, perhaps, if you place the matter in as hopeful a light as you can. It will not do to allow any definite discouragement to gain circulation at this ——"

Here Merchant Morris was interrupted by a quiet voice saying:

"Good-morning, Friend Morris; thou art early upon thy affairs to-day."

It was a tall, quiet-faced Quaker, wrapped in a gray woolen shawl, and with his broad-brimmed hat pulled well down.

"It is a pressing matter, though no more my own than yours, friend, which compels me to be early astir," replied Morris.

"Ah," said the Quaker. "Some affair of Congress, or the army."



"A most active necessity," said Morris. He drew off his gloves, took out Washington's letter and read it aloud once more. When he had concluded, he added: "You see, it was not a thing to be dandled over."

The tall Quaker nodded.

"As thou sayest, friend, a most pressing business, indeed." He looked at Merchant Morris for a moment with quiet eyes. "What sum does General Washington mention?" he asked.

"Fifty thousand dollars."

"It is a great deal." Again came the pause; then he continued in the same unruffled voice, "Friend Robert, what security canst thou offer against a loan of such size?"

"My note and my honor," promptly.

The Quaker smiled and nodded.

"More no man could ask," said he. "Thou shalt have it, but," with a wave of the hand, "thou must allow me one day to gather the sum together, since it must be in coin."

"Friend," said Robert Morris, delightedly, "I am greatly beholden to you."

"By this evening, then," said the other, as he started on his way, "you may expect it."



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When he had gone, Ben Cooper fell in silently by the side of Mr. Morris. Already the latter was planning the next step.

"You rode from Trenton yesterday," he said, "and because of me have had no sleep during the night. It would be too much to ask you to take horse again this morning."

"If it is necessary," spoke Ben, "you need only give me the word."

"Excellent! Then, if that is your spirit, I say to you that it is necessary. What is the earliest hour you can reach the camp?"

"By sundown."

"Very well. I will not detain you to write a letter. Merely say to the general that fifty thousand dollars will be on its way to him in a swift carriage by the time your message is delivered."

Seeing that there was no more to be said, Ben saluted the financier, military fashion, and started at a brisk pace for the City Tavern. Within an hour both he and the Porcupine had breakfasted and were in the saddle, headed for Washington's camp on the upper Delaware.



## CHAPTER IV

### HOW GOOD NEWS CAME TO TRENTON

THE two young riders clung to the western side of the river upon the return journey ; it is true that panic, after the disaster at Trenton, had cleared the stations below of the Hessians, but Ben knew that a British army would soon be on its way to attempt to drive Washington back, and he did not feel at all sure that the enemy were not in possession of Burlington and Bordentown once more.

Some distance above Bristol they detected a small party of horsemen on the road ahead, and approached slowly, their pistols ready at hand. But the sharp eyes of Ben Cooper soon made out the party, and he gave a laugh of satisfaction.

"It's Nat and the two Prentiss boys," he said. "Out on a scout, I suppose."

The three youths mentioned had recognized them about the same time, and now came on with shouts of greeting.



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"What news?" asked Ben of the most stalwart of the three, a lad with bronzed face and keen eye.

"The army has recrossed the river," replied Nat Brewster. "The last of them went over early to-day."

"What of the enemy?" demanded the Porcupine, still fingering his huge pistol.

The boys all laughed at his belligerent attitude.

"They are on the way to meet us," replied Ezra Prentiss. "We heard something of it before we left camp. They say that Lord Cornwallis was just about to take ship for England when the word of the taking of Trenton reached General Howe; and now he is back in the Jerseys at the head of their force once more."

"News was brought in that the enemy have gathered all their scattered forces at Princeton," said George Prentiss, twin brother to Ezra. "Cornwallis brought with him a strong reinforcement of picked troops, and with those of Grant there are some eight thousand of them ready to march if they have not already started."



The three youths had been on the other side of the river seeking traces of the enemy from that direction, but finding none had crossed the stream upon a flatboat, thinking to fall in with Ben, as they had done. All five now started north having made up their minds to cross the river at the point where the troops had effected their latest passage. The Prentiss twins rode on ahead, while Ben Cooper and his stalwart cousin, Nat Brewster, followed some little distance behind. A great deal of news had made its way into the American camp during Ben's two days' absence, through scouts, spies and deserting Hessians, and Nat knew that the other would be eager to hear it all.

"They are pressing<sup>1</sup> wagons on every hand," said young Brewster; "when we left, we heard that their advance pickets were very near to Trenton."

"What is thought of the situation at headquarters?" asked Ben.

"From a word here and a word there, I gather that they are rather anxious. The

<sup>1</sup> "Pressing wagons"—taking those of the New Jersey farmers for the use of the British army.



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winning of Trenton, however, has roused the Jerseys at last, and the militia is beginning to rise. Cadwallader and Mifflin have been ordered in with their commands and should reach camp to-day. The general seems to have made up his mind to fight, but it looks to me that he will now have to do so whether he would or no, for the enemy is before and the river is behind. And this time he must not retreat, for to do that would dishearten the Jersey men and the country as well."

The boys reached Washington's camp shortly after dark, and Ben instantly presented himself at headquarters. As he stood, saluting in an outer room, a smart young officer demanded his business.

"To see the general."

"Your business," said the young officer, curtly.

"A message from Mr. Robert Morris, at Philadelphia," said Ben.

"I will take it to the general," the other informed him.

"My message is by word of mouth," said Ben, "and is, perhaps, of an urgent and private nature."



“Wait here,” said the young officer as he arose. He spent but a very few moments in the inner room ; and when he returned he was as curt and businesslike as before.

“You are to go in,” said he, and one finger indicated the door.

When Ben entered the room where Washington sat, he found him engaged with two other officers. These were Mifflin and Cadwallader, leaders of Pennsylvania militia, who had but a few hours before arrived in camp with their combined force, approaching four thousand men.

“I am grateful to you, gentlemen,” the commander-in-chief was saying. “It is not always,” a trifle bitterly, “that my desires are so promptly answered.”

“We are under your directions,” said General Mifflin, coldly ; “and we trust that we know some of the duties that devolve upon under officers.”

General Cadwallader glanced at his brother officer as though the tone, the words and the manner were not agreeable to him.

“I got your orders at Crosswicks—joined Mifflin accordingly, and set out.” The tone



and manner here were eager, soldier-like, and respectful. "I hope, general, you have some good fighting to offer us."

Washington paid no attention to the attitude of Mifflin; to Cadwallader he replied:

"It is more than likely that there will be a clash in a day or two that will put a decided point upon the affairs of the states; and if it's fighting you seek, general," with a smile, "I think we can please you."

"I could not get across the river to be of assistance to you a week ago," said Cadwallader, "and have since been prevented by lack of enemies from being of service. Pennsylvania wants her troops in action, and I am only too eager to try them under fire in an engagement of consequence."

There was a great deal passed upon both sides; but through it all General Mifflin said nothing, sitting coldly erect with a face of stony indifference. At length General Washington noticed the lad in the doorway, his hand still raised in the gesture of salute.

"Ah, Cooper," said he, concerned; "I had let you slip my mind. Pomroy just now told me that you had returned." Then, leaning



over his table, eagerly, "What letters do you bring me?"

"None, sir," replied the boy. "Master Morris bade me tell you what he had to say."

A shadow crossed the grave face of the commander-in-chief; evidently this, to his mind, promised no good.

"Go on," he said.

"I told Master Morris that I should reach camp by sundown to-day; and he said that I was to inform you that, by then, a swift carriage would be on its way, bearing fifty thousand dollars for the use of the army."

The cloud passed from General Washington's face like magic; a look of great satisfaction replaced it.

"Excellent!" he said. "I felt sure," to the other officers, "that Morris would not fail me, if it were at all possible to procure the money."

"The nation is indeed fortunate to have the services of so able a man in the capacity in which he is serving," said Cadwallader. "In the matter of finance, Morris is little short of a wizard." After a few more questions, Ben was told that was all, and retired.



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At once he sought out his friends, where they sat about a fire preparing their supper along with some others. And during their meal there was much gossip exchanged.

"Cornwallis will be upon us to-morrow," said a young sergeant of horse, who was of the party. "We have all day been catching sight of light bodies thrown out in advance."

"I have heard that Howe himself has landed a couple of regiments at Amboy and is on the march," spoke another.

"Well, let him come," said a youthful artilleryman; "the more of them, the greater chance we will have at them with the shells. To reach us they must cross the Assanpink Creek a little below there; the stone bridge is narrow, and the water is deep and our guns are so planted as to sweep it from end to end."

Some few hours were spent in pleasant fashion, chatting and discussing the prospects of the coming fight. Later Nat and Ben found themselves without the lines of sparkling fires; a little distance away they could hear the sentries pacing up and down, and now



and then the rattle of a piece of artillery wheeling into place would reach their ears. Somehow, as the thought of the approaching battle grew upon them, they had become graver, and so fell into a talk concerning family things and interests which had nothing in common with their friends; and so they had arisen and strolled away.

The night was a quiet one; the city of Trenton lay before them like some gloomy, crouching thing awaiting its fate on the morrow; had not their military experience told them that their pickets lay all about them with masked fires, they would have fancied the countryside deserted. Ben had just been speaking feelingly of his father, whom he had not had time to call upon while in Philadelphia, and they stood leaning against the tongue of an empty baggage wagon, deep in the softer reflections which home and home things bring uppermost. Then they were aroused by the sound of voices and footsteps, and the flash of a tinder box showed them two men standing at the door of a small house which the boys in the semi-darkness had not before noted.



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"Ah, I can see it now," said one of them. "The step is broken, and I have missed a nasty fall more than once."

The flash died out almost instantly, and the two men stood in the shadows for a moment in silence. Then the second one spoke:

"The whole matter has reached an acute pass, General Mifflin; a great many of our citizens demand to know the facts, and I thought that perhaps——"

The cold voice of Mifflin interrupted:

"But why have you selected me as the one best calculated to give you information? I have not been with the main command; and the fact is, I know nothing, except by hearsay."

"But you know the man; you were with him at the first, were you not?"

"I was an aide when he first was made what he is. But the candid fact is that I was never attracted by him, and therefore gave him little attention, save in the way of duty."

Again there was a silence; then the other spoke once more:

"I am sorry that this is the case. I had hoped that you would be of much assistance



to us in coming to a proper knowledge of the situation."

"I can tell you nothing that any one could not tell you," insisted Mifflin.

"What are the prospects for an immediate action?" asked the second man, after a moment.

"So far as I can learn—excellent."

"And what are the chances for success?"

"As good as ever. Strangely enough, our army is still possessed of the fighting spirit, in spite of their wretched condition."

"Ah!" The voice of the other had an eager note deep in it, which attracted the instant attention of Ben Cooper. "I had heard that they were not well conditioned or provided for. Also I hear that the general has found it not at all easy to come by supplies of money."

"No doubt all have heard such rumors," said Mifflin; "I, too, have met with them. But as to money being hard to procure, I am not sure. While I was with Washington only a short time ago, the news came that fifty thousand dollars in coin was on its way."

"Here?" asked the other.



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"Here, to be sure," replied Mifflin.

"Ah!" said the man, and again the eager note in his voice attracted Ben Cooper, "that is interesting."

"Washington seemed to find it so," replied Mifflin, drily. Then he added: "And now, sir, if you will pardon me, I think I shall try and get some sleep. I have had a hard day and by all appearance to-morrow will be much harder."

Thereupon the other, apparently not at all satisfied, judging from his tone, bade the general good-night; Mifflin entered his headquarters, where a light at once appeared, while the other man strode away into the darkness.

Nat Brewster was the first to speak.

"That," said he, "was a queer sort of thing. I don't quite understand it." Pondering a moment, he added: "Evidently this man who was with General Mifflin had come on an errand concerning the strength or weakness of a certain person."

"And that person," said Ben Cooper, without hesitation, "is none other than General Washington."

"Right," said Nat; "the general it is."



“But,” and there was a mystified quality in Ben’s voice and manner, “while that interests me, still there is something which attracts me still more.”

“And what is that?”

“I should like to know who that man is.” Ben pointed in the direction taken by Mifflin’s late companion, and Nat understood at once.

“So?” said he. “And why are you so much interested in him?”

“Somehow,” said Ben, “while he talked I seemed to recognize his voice—not so much its general quality, as a note that came into it now and then. It told of a sort of eagerness—a desire to learn something, which I seem strangely familiar with. And oddly enough, it strikes me that it was not so long ago that I heard it. It seems as though——” Here he paused, and through the semi-darkness his hand reached out and grasped Nat’s arm tightly. “I know who it was,” he said. “It was a man whom I met at the City Tavern in Philadelphia only last night—a man of the name of Tobias Hawkins!”



## CHAPTER V

### IN WHICH AN ARMY CREPT AWAY IN THE NIGHT AND FOUGHT THE BATTLE OF PRINCETON

HAVING had no proper rest on the previous night, Ben slept well on that night of the first of January; early in the morning, however, he was up and had snatched his breakfast and was in the saddle.

Washington had selected a position for his main body on the east side of the Assanpink and, as the young artilleryman had said the night before, the batteries were so planted as to sweep the stone bridge over that stream, and the fords. Word came in by Ezra and George Prentiss, who had taken horse in the small hours of the morning, that the main body of Lord Cornwallis was advancing. At once strong parties were sent out under General Greene; these met and engaged advance parties of British, or hung upon the flanks of the main body like terriers, and so greatly impeded their progress.



It was noon, therefore, when Cornwallis reached the north bank of the Shabbakong, where he halted for a time ; then he crossed to the other side, when the light parties of Americans once more began to worry him with their rifle fire. Made angry by this, the British charged into the woods and dislodged their annoyers ; afterward they pushed on with little or no interference until they reached the high ground outside Trenton. Here Colonel Hand's body of riflemen poured out such a warm greeting that the British were for the time checked. But in a little while orders were sent to Hand to fall back, as the ground was not thought to be one upon which the struggle could be undertaken with advantage.

When the riflemen retreated upon the main body of the American force, it was almost sunset ; in a fury at being so delayed, Cornwallis rushed his troops through the town of Trenton, formed them into columns and attempted to cross the Assanpink by the stone bridge and the fords.

But a storm of bullets and solid shot drove him back ; again and again the gallant Briton hurled his force at the crossings, but each time



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the batteries sent them reeling back. Washington, mounted upon his white horse, was stationed at the American end of the bridge giving his orders in person; and each time the enemy was repulsed the lines of his soldiers roared their approval.

During all this time the British cannon were by no means silent; they thundered and smoked and hurled their missiles with all the skill of their handlers, but with little damage to the Americans. Then, as the night had closed in, Cornwallis hushed their anger, ceased his attempts to cross the creek, and went into camp.

Ben Cooper and his friends stood watching the fires of the enemy gleaming in the darkness.

"Put off until another day," said Ben, soberly.

"I thought, by the way it began, that we'd know victory or defeat by this," remarked George Prentiss.

"How long do you think we'll be able to hold them?" asked Nat Brewster of Ezra Prentiss.

"Cornwallis is a general of resource and



enterprise," replied Ezra. "To-day he has tried a direct forcing of our front; to-morrow he will adopt different measures."

"I suppose you're right," said Ben Cooper, still more soberly than before. "And that means that he'll begin flanking movements and other things in which his veteran troops will have a tremendous advantage over our untrained militia."

To guard against a surprise, or to be ready to receive the enemy in the early morning should he wait so long before attacking, the Americans kept their weapons beside them. Washington patrolled his camp with care and anxiety; it was a night of terrible suspense; never before since the beginning of the war had the Americans risked so much upon the outcome of a single struggle; defeat meant annihilation.

The commander-in-chief, accompanied by a few officers, paused in his rounds at no great distance from where the boys stood. Sitting erect in his saddle, he examined the fires of Cornwallis with speculative eye.

"They sleep as though feeling their prey secure," said General Greene.



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"Our discipline is not great enough to hold him back," said Washington, his gaze still upon the watch-fires of the enemy; "a front to front engagement is out of the question."

The boys saw Greene turn a look upon his fellow officers; it was plain that, from this, he expected something more. And he was not disappointed.

"By this time," said General Washington, in a quiet way and with the manner of a man who is weighing something of vital import, "the greater part of the enemy must be on its way to Trenton, to assist in crushing us."

"I think there is scarcely any doubt of that," answered Greene. "We have given my Lord Cornwallis a taste of our mettle lately, and he'll not trifle with us, you may depend."

"They will be drawn from Princeton," said Washington, "in detachments of no great strength. If encountered, a competent force could beat them in detail. And then Brunswick, where all their baggage and stores lie, would be left practically undefended."

General Greene drew in his breath sharply; the other officers stirred in their saddles, their



eyes gleaming expectantly in the firelight. Washington, who had made no sign that he had noted the proximity of his young riders, now surprised them by suddenly facing them.

"Prentiss," said he, singling out Ezra; and the latter at once advanced to the side of the great white horse. The commander-in-chief said: "When you brought in your information as to the movements of the enemy, this morning, did you not say that a force was left behind a little way out of Trenton, as a rear guard?"

"About six miles, or half-way to Princeton, general," answered Ezra promptly. "It is under command of General Leslie; I saw him plainly."

"And they were on the direct road between Trenton and Princeton?"

"Yes, general."

"That will be all."

Ezra fell back to his friends; the commander turned to his officers.

"There is another way to Princeton—a more circuitous one, known as the Quaker Road," said Washington. "Do you think, Mercer," to the Virginian officer who was in the group,



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“that a movement could be successfully made in that direction?”

“I am sure of it,” declared General Mercer, enthusiastically. “A quick march, a blow when they least expect it at Princeton, destroy what baggage they’ve left there—and then a rush upon Brunswick, where we can deal them a blow that will cripple them.”

There was a chorus of voices raised in praise of the proposition. But Washington’s hand went up.

“First,” said he, “we will discuss the matter in detail. And as your quarters are the nearest, Mercer,” to his friend, “we will go there.”

At once the party of general officers turned their horses’ heads toward the house where Mercer was lodged. What took place there the lads never knew, but that the plan which Washington had so sketched was finally agreed upon in detail was evident before an hour had passed.

Swiftly the order was given ; the teamsters and the baggage were soon silently on their way to Burlington. Intrenching tools were brought forward with great bustle, and numbers of men



were set vigorously to work near the bridge and each ford, throwing up earthworks. With much clatter and loud talking this work went forward in the hearing of the British sentinels across the creek. Camp-fires were kept burning, and from time to time guards were relieved in such a manner that the enemy could not help being aware of it.

And while this was going forward, the main body of the army noiselessly slipped away toward Princeton. The progress was slow at first, because the roads were soft; but suddenly the direction of the wind altered, the cold became intense, and the wagon way froze to the hardness of iron.

The orders were that the men left behind to deceive the enemy were to continue on the Assanpink until daybreak, when they were to abandon their pretense and hasten after the army. General Mercer commanded the advance party along the Quaker Road which, being new and encumbered with stumps, made slow traveling.

It was about sunrise when the army reached the bridge at Stony Brook, three miles from Princeton. Ben Cooper and his friends, who



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were detailed with Mercer's advance party, heard that officer say to one of his aides :

“ We should have been entering the town by this. I'm afraid that daylight will expose our movements.”

Mercer, under orders, took up his course along the brook ; Washington led the main body into a by-road which his guides claimed was a short cut into Princeton. It was Mercer's intent to seize or destroy a bridge on the main road, so as to prevent the flight of the British when Washington attacked them.

Along trailed Mercer, following the stream, and away marched Washington by the side road ; they had gone some little way toward their objective points, and still the enemy had not perceived them. However, before Mercer reached the bridge, the British 17th, under Colonel Mawhood, crossed it on the way to Trenton, where they had been ordered. The glitter of the rifle barrels of Mercer's men attracted the attention of some one in the 17th, and Mawhood was instantly on the alert. It was impossible for the British to make out the full strength of the Americans, owing to the thick woods ; but probably the British



leader fancied them a detachment flying from a possible defeat at Trenton ; and so made up his mind to capture them.

Swift riders were sent spurring back to Princeton to inform two additional regiments, also under marching orders, of the condition of affairs ; once these were on the ground, so Mawhood reasoned, the Americans could be surrounded.

The van of Mercer's brigade was nearing the desired bridge when Ben Cooper, riding ahead, made out the scarlet of the British through the naked trees. Instantly his holster pistol was out and he had fired a shot of warning ; whirling about his mount he dashed back to the companions he had left a little while before. The alarm shot had startled the American officers into instant action ; Mercer galloped up and at once saw the task before him. Like a trained soldier he glanced about for a natural advantage ; some high ground to the right attracted him and he ordered his men to make for it. The regiment of Mawhood noted the vantage point about the same time and also rushed to occupy it.

But the Americans were the first to reach



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the high ground and formed behind a hedge fence. Their rifles at once opened upon the British, who returned the fire with deadly accuracy. Mercer's horse was killed under him, and several of his officers fell. A confusion struck the American troops, and, noting this, with comprehensive eye, Mawhood met the situation like a master.

“With bayonet—charge!” he commanded.

With leveled muskets, each bayonet-tipped, the British 17th rushed up the sides of the elevation.

“Meet them, lads,” shouted the brave Mercer, who had freed himself from his dead horse and was now upon his feet, sword in hand. “Club your pieces! Meet them like men!”

But the clubbed muskets were of little use against the bristling steel of the onrushing veterans; at the first onset the Americans broke; Mercer tried to rally them, but was struck down; with flashing blade he arose and defended himself—but was pierced by a half dozen bayonets, and the rush of the enemy passed over his brave body.

To the crest of the hill charged the 17th,



cheered on by Mawhood and his officers ; once there they came to a sudden halt, however, for they saw a heavy body of troops emerging from the woods and advancing toward them.

This was a regiment of Pennsylvania militia which had been sent forward by Washington upon the first volley from Mercer's brigade.

"Give them the artillery," directed the businesslike Mawhood, as he watched the Pennsylvanians pushing upon him.

In a moment the pieces of cannon which he carried with him were brought into play, and in the face of their heavy discharge, the Americans, who were but recruits, halted and began to waver. For a moment the situation was strong with peril, and then Nat Brewster, who stood with the Prentiss twins, Ben and some score of the hardier spirits, behind a fringe of trees, loading and firing like machines, suddenly uttered a shout of joy.

"It's not over yet," said he, pointing to the brow of a neighboring hill. There stood a great white horse and upon it was a powerful, erect rider, who surveyed the situation with eagle glance.



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"It's General Washington!" shouted Ben Cooper.

As he spoke the commander-in-chief dashed down the side of the hill, the white charger moving like the wind; with voice ringing with confidence, he called up Mercer's broken force.

"Turn and at them, my brave fellows. Shall it be said that you ran with arms in your hands?"

Here and there a man paused; and no sooner had he done so than some others joined him; in a few moments the breathless officers were reforming them into lines and gasping out words of encouragement. Through a flight of bullets, Washington swept up and down, giving orders, shouting encouragement, waving his sword in circles of light. Never was there a plainer mark for the stray bullet which usually brings greatness down; but, as Providence willed, none found it then.

The Pennsylvanians, wavering under the cannon shot of Mawhood, saw this act of daring on the part of their chief, and steadied instantly. A battery of artillery now opened upon the British from a hilltop, and the



grape-shot began to cut them down. And, as though this were not enough, a Virginia regiment broke from out the woods and charged furiously upon them.

Almost in a single moment Mawhood was plunged from the height of success to a situation of desperate danger. But he was skilful and brave, and not the sort to fail in any kind of action ; with high courage he drove his men at the ring that had all but closed him in and fought his way back to the Trenton road.

Washington, as he dashed to and fro, as much endangered by the fire of his own men as that of the British, witnessed this gallant effort of Mawhood's with admiration ; nevertheless he sent a detachment of the Pennsylvanians in pursuit with directions to break down the bridge upon their return, in order that General Leslie, of Cornwallis' rear guard, might be delayed should he advance to attack them before their task was done.

While this sharp encounter was in progress, another British regiment, the 55th, was met nearer Princeton by the American general St. Clair ; a steep ravine was the scene of this struggle, which was brief but desperate ; the



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British broke and fled across the fields toward Brunswick ; seeing them in flight, the remaining regiment, which had not come up in time to be of assistance to their fellows, also broke ; a part of them hurried in the direction of Brunswick, but a strong body threw themselves into the college building at Princeton and began a stubborn resistance.

They were firing from windows and from protected parts of the roof when Ben Cooper, bearing a dispatch from Washington to St. Clair, rode up. As St. Clair tore open the dispatch, he said grimly to one of his colonels :

“ Bring up the guns ; we’ll try if this student body can stand before a row of such schoolmasters.”

The artillery wheeled into place and began hurling their shot into the college. It took but a few moments of this to bring the cry for quarter from within. The doors were flung open, and the Americans rushed into the building, where the British had thrown down their arms.

But some of them, apparently, had not agreed to giving up so readily ; and as the victors rushed in at one end, they dashed for



the windows at the other, leaped through and went racing away. A party was dispatched in pursuit, but later returned with only a handful ; the others had escaped in the woods.

Washington pursued the routed regiments as far as Kingston ; here, with his officers, he held a council of war. It was decided that the men were too worn out to push on to Brunswick with any speed, and that Cornwallis would be upon them before they could reach there. The word was therefore given, and the army, destroying bridges behind them, marched away toward the wooded and frowning heights about Morristown.

And as they went, Ben Cooper rode at the side of Nat Brewster, his face thoughtful and his manner strangely still. At length Nat noticed it.

“What has happened?” he asked, anxiously.

“Nothing,” replied Ben. “That is,” he added, “nothing as yet. But I fear that something—a something that neither you nor I can put hands upon—will happen, and perhaps at no distant time.”

Nat looked at him in surprise.



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"I don't understand," said he.

"Nor I, if it comes to that," returned Ben. Then after a short pause, he inquired: "Do you recall my saying, last night, that I fancied I heard, in conversation with General Mifflin, the voice of a stranger whom I had encountered in Philadelphia?"

"Yes."

"Well," said Ben, and there was an odd foreboding in his tone, "this morning, at one of the windows of Princeton College, while the British were escaping, I thought I saw his face."



## CHAPTER VI

### TELLS HOW BEN COOPER ENCOUNTERED THE MAN WITH THE YELLOW SMILE

BEFORE retiring on the night before, Lord Cornwallis had looked at the lines of American camp-fires and listened to the sound of the mattocks and spades at the east end of the bridge.

"In the morning," said my lord, using the language of the English huntsman, "I will bag the fox."

At daylight, however, the thunder of cannon from the direction of Princeton awoke him from his sleep; once without he saw the dying watch-fires and deserted camp of the Americans.

"They are gone," said his general, Grant, in a tone which was one of mixed wonder and rage. "They have escaped us."

Again came the roar of guns from along the Princeton road.

"Harken to that," said Cornwallis, bitterly.



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"They have probably not only escaped us, but are making a rush upon Brunswick to capture our stores."

With the celerity of trained soldiers, the British veterans got under way, and at top speed, with their officers urging them on, they marched toward Princeton. The Pennsylvania militia had ceased their pursuit and were engaged in destroying the bridge at Stony Brook; it was partly down when the cannon of Cornwallis drove them away; then, unable to pass by way of the bridge, the British, horse, foot and artillery, plunged into the cold water and gained the other side.

But the delay at the bridge permitted the Americans to draw a long and safe distance away; and seeing that there was no hope of overtaking them, Cornwallis pushed on to Brunswick, thankful at least that his stores were safe.

The American troops were still on the march toward the hills when Ben was summoned by an ensign to report to the commander-in-chief. Riding through a press of officers, his right hand at the salute, the boy reached the side of Washington.



"Is your mount fresh enough to make a second journey to Philadelphia?" asked the commander.

"Yes, general."

"I have another message for Mr. Robert Morris; and as there is no time to write it, you must carry it as you carried his to me."

Ben saluted.

"The money which he was to dispatch on the night of the first has been delayed, so Master Morris states in a letter received but now. Say to him that the utmost care must be exercised in the transportation of the coin, because of the unsettled state of the roads; say that I desire him to have a guard accompany the carriage, and instruct the person in charge to make for Morristown and not Trenton."

There were some minor additions to this; and upon receiving the order, Ben wheeled his horse and rode back to his friends.

"Back to Philadelphia," he announced, "and at once."

They gathered around him and offered advice as to the most trustworthy way of making his journey. It was no child's task to cover the ground between their present situation and



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the river, as they well knew. Ben shook each of them by the hand and bid them good-bye; then taking a rough by-road which ran almost directly toward the Delaware, he spurred forward upon his mission.

It was almost noon and the January sun sparkled upon the snow-covered fields; lower and redder it fell in the west until at length, when he sighted the ice-packed Delaware, the long shadows were stealing along the fringes of woods and upon the eastern slopes of the hills.

The cold which had so fortunately followed the veering of the wind upon the night before, freezing the soft road under the feet of the American troops, had here served a like purpose. The river was a solid mass and, after a little examination, Ben had no hesitation in venturing his horse upon it; the footing was strong every step of the way and he arrived upon the far side without any trouble.

“That was a piece of rare fortune,” muttered Ben, as he sat in the saddle and looked back at the long stretch of gray ice; “indeed, it was by far the most uncertain part of the journey.”



With a brief stop upon the river bank to rest his horse he rode forward upon the way to Bristol, and pulled up at the inn at that place some time after dark. There was a cheery light streaming through the inn windows; the sparks that flew from the chimney told of a roaring fire, and the scent of most excellent cooking crept out of the keyholes and under the doors. After his horse had been seen to, Ben was about to enter, when the hostler, a pale little man, with scant light hair, and mild eyes, said rather hesitatingly :

“These be rather uncertain times upon the road, sir.”

“Ay, and every other place,” answered Ben, with a smile.

The pale little hostler shook his head.

“But the road is the worst of all, I think,” said he. “For, you see, sir,” in explanation, “the road is most frequented—especially a road like this. And being a great deal frequented,” ominously, “a great many desperate characters are to be found upon it.”

Ben looked at him; there was something in the mild face which held his attention.

“Ah, yes,” said the lad, “desperate charac-



ters. In wild times like these there are many such, no doubt."

"You may say so, young gentleman, you may say so, indeed. We are in fair terror of some of them, at times. They come here and do as they please; and if we say but a word they threaten our lives." He paused and one hand stroked the horse's neck for a moment; then he added: "Perhaps you wouldn't care to go in there," with a nod toward the inn door, "if you knew that one of that sort was within."

Ben smiled good naturedly.

"Why," said he, "I confess, friend, that I have no great liking for such persons. But as my business at this time brings me in contact with more or less ungentle conduct, I don't suppose that I need put myself about because of a trifle additional."

He nodded, still smiling, to the little man, and lifting the latch entered the inn. As he had noted, the room was filled with candle-light; a great fire of billets crackled and blazed in the fireplace; and the smell of savory dishes being prepared in copper sauce-pans came with added distinctness to his nos-



trils. Ben's round face, fresh colored cheeks and merry eyes always made him liked wherever he went, and as he stood stamping the snow from his boots in the doorway, he said to the buxom landlady :

“ A good-evening to you, mistress ; I hope your cooking is as good as it smells, for I am well toward being famished.”

He knocked some clogging particles from his heels with the stock of his riding whip ; and as he was doing so, he noted with surprise that his cheery greeting was not replied to. He had stopped at the inn upon frequent occasions, and was known to the landlady ; never before had she failed to bid him welcome.

So glancing up, he was about to say something more, when he noticed that her face was pale, and that she was trembling with anger.

“ And so, landlady,” said a voice, “ I may have no supper, eh ? ”

“ You may have supper, sir,” said the woman. “ You have but to conduct yourself in a fitting manner.”

The person whom she addressed was a huge, loose-jointed fellow with long black hair as



straight as that of an Indian, and attired in a soiled traveling costume. He had sharp, ratty black eyes and a wide, thin-lipped mouth. His grin at the landlady's words showed a row of yellowed teeth.

"Conduct myself in a fitting manner," said he; "why, mistress, you asking that is like demanding that the fire be warm or the breeze be cool. I always so conduct myself."

"That you do it now is all I ask," said the landlady.

"Then serve my supper, which I see upon the coals; it seems to be done to a nicety, and I am rarely hungry."

"Again I tell you that these," and the landlady pointed to the saucepans bubbling away in the fireplace, "belong to those who came before you. It is the rule of the inn to serve its patrons in turn; and I do not intend to break my rules at this late day."

"But I assure you, good mistress, that I am one who has very little respect for rules of whatsoever description," said the man. "A supper I want, and a supper I will have, and that speedily."

"It is a young lady, I tell you," said the



hostess; "and with her is a weak old man, her father."

"Young ladies have no business upon the road in these times," said the fellow, his yellowed teeth well displayed. "And as for weak old men, better for them if they stopped at home at all times."

Ben crossed the room and stood by the fireplace, his back to the blaze; the night was cold, and the heat was comforting.

"Better, indeed," said the landlady, "when they must be interfered with by such as you."

"Keep a civil tongue in your head," said the man, and his yellow smile grew particularly evil; his narrow eyes sparkled with anger, and his great, bony hands grasped the arms of his chair.

"There are few, if any, that can say that I ever treated them uncivilly," maintained the landlady, "and if my words are at all severe, it is your own fault."

"We have had a-plenty of words," growled the man; "a-plenty, good lady, and we'll have no more. A supper I want at once, and a supper I will have, so have some of your



kitchen folk serve it to me, or upon my soul I will serve it myself!"

As the landlady said nothing, the man with the yellow teeth arose; and as he did so a door leading to an inner room opened and a young girl appeared.

"My father is quite comfortable now," she said to the landlady. "Thanks to your kindness in so looking after us," she added, with a grateful look and smile. "He says he would like to eat something if it is quite ready; and that is a very encouraging sign, indeed."

"His supper is just right," said the landlady, her lips set firmly together, as she gave the insistent guest a defiant look. She had crossed about half the room when he stepped before her. To avoid him she moved aside; then his huge hand closed upon her arm; and startled, she uttered a smothered shriek. At this there came a feeble answering cry; in the doorway where the girl had appeared, stood a tottering old gentleman in a dressing gown and supporting himself by means of a stick.

"Daughter," he cried, "Betsy, my dear!"

"Here, father," and the girl ran to him.



"I thought I heard you cry out," said the old man. "And I came to your assistance."

The man with the yellow smile laughed loudly at this.

"Good for you, old rooster," said he, highly entertained. "You are a game one, but over old to be of use. And now, mistress," to the landlady, "will you out of my way while I see to my boiled mutton?"

He gave her a fling at which she cried out once more. The old man tottered forward, his stick grasped in one quavering hand. But his dim old eyes flashed for all his feebleness, and he cried out bravely :

"What, sir! and would you lift a hand to a woman?"

The man showed his yellow teeth, much as a dog might have done.

"Old sir," he warned, "meddle not where you have no acquaintance. As for the woman, I'd never laid a hand on her had she not been so stubborn."

"He'd eat your supper, sir, that's what he'd do," sobbed the landlady. "The hungry wretch cares for no one."

"Right there, mistress," jeered the man.



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"I do not, indeed. And to show that I do not, here's for the saucepans, for I can withstand the temptations of their smell no longer."

With that he strode, with mouth agrin, toward the fireplace; the old man waved his stick feebly but was thrust aside with no gentle hand; and then the fellow came face to face with Ben Cooper.

Pale-faced landladies, slim young girls and tottering old men seemed of the sort that had no power to stop him; and now he leered at the round-faced stripling with the fresh cheeks of a schoolboy.

"Ah, you are there, are you, my lad?" said he, with enjoyment plain in his voice.

Ben looked at him quietly and nodded.

"Yes," said he; "here I am, and here I have been for some time. Indeed," thoughtfully, "I think I came during the first discussion with regard to the rights of the earlier patron."

"Ah, did you so!" The man waved him aside with one huge hand. "Well, you have been there long enough. Stand aside."

But the lad did not move; a wicked look



came into the ratty eyes, and again the huge hand waved him away.

“Belike you’ll have me do more than wave with the hand,” said the man. “I’ll give you a moment to choose.”

Ben at once stepped aside, giving the ruffian a clear way to the fireplace. With the yellow grin wide upon his face, the man stooped to lift the bubbling saucepans from the fire. But before he could so much as touch them, something beat a sharp rat-tat-tat upon his head; leaping up, he found Ben regarding him calmly, a pistol in his hand.

“You seem in haste, sir,” said the boy, as he trifled with the lock of his weapon carelessly. “It may be that the use of a pistol barrel to drive an idea into your head is not to your liking.”

For an instant the man was taken aback, but he quickly recovered his poise.

“So they have taken to entrusting children with firearms?” sneered he. “It is a thing of which I can’t say I approve; and so, lad, I bid you to put that toy down, or I shall be compelled to assume your father’s place, and take a cudgel to you.”



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"It's a cold night," said the youth, "but I fancy that you can bear the cold much better than we can your company." The pistol barrel indicated the door. "So go at once, and let us have no further waste of words."

The man saw that his attitude of disbelief in the boy would be of no use; and so with an evil look, he crossed the floor and threw open the door. Then he halted.

"This is not the first time that I've seen you," he said. "I make no mistake in you, because you were carefully pointed out to me by a gentleman who has," here the yellow smile was most manifest, "your future much in mind."

"That," said Ben, quietly, "is very thoughtful of him."

The man nodded.

"Ay; and he'll continue to be thoughtful, unless I am much mistaken in him. He is a man who, when he once becomes interested in any one, seldom lets him slip his mind. And in your case," the man gestured admiringly, "he has gone so far as to provide against his forgetting. He has desired me to also remember you; and you may depend," with a



laugh that made the good landlady shudder, "that no matter what he may do, I shall not forget."

And with that the door slapped to, and the man was gone.



## CHAPTER VII

### IN WHICH THE HOSTLER SEES TWO SHADOWS IN THE ROAD

THERE was a complete silence for a moment after the man had gone ; then the landlady spoke.

“ Well, of all the knaves that ever turned a decent inn topsyturvy, that one is the worst.”

The old gentleman approached Ben, his stick thumping the floor with each step.

“ Young sir,” said he, in his piping voice, “ I am thankful to you for the service you have rendered us.”

Ben nodded his head and smiled in his usual good-natured way.

“ Why,” said he, “ it is but a trifling thing to get rid of a rascal of that stripe. They seldom have the courage they seem to have.”

“ Nevertheless,” and the old man held up his thin hand in protest, “ he was a formidable villain enough. I thank you, and my daughter thanks you.”



Here the girl came forward a step or two.

"I do thank you," she said, sweetly; "I was in great fear of the man, for he seemed capable of anything." Then as she saw Ben was of a mind to still make light of the matter, she added, laughingly, "Well, at any rate you have saved our boiled mutton and the rest of the things; and even though you persist in refusing our thanks, perhaps you will not refuse to accept a part of our supper."

"Now, my dear, that was well thought of," quavered the old gentleman, very well pleased. "No doubt, young sir," to Ben, "you have ridden a long way and are both worn and hungry."

"I can answer 'yes' to the latter part," laughed Ben, as he helped the landlady to set aside the saucepans, "but I am not over tired, as I have ridden but from Princeton."

"From Princeton, did you say?" The old gentleman was very eager. "Then, perhaps, you came by way of Trenton and saw the army encamped?"

Ben shook his head.

"No," said he, "I avoided Trenton as much



as I could. Lord Cornwallis is not in great good humor just now, and I did not care to fall into the hands of any of his people."

The old gentleman grasped the arm of a chair, and then sat down.

"Cornwallis in Trenton! Surely you are mistaken," he said. "Why, General Washington is there."

"He was there," corrected Ben, "but now he is at Morristown."

"There has been a battle!" cried the girl. "And we have been defeated."

The old man tried to rise out of the chair but fell back.

"No, no," he said. "That cannot be. If there was a battle, we were victorious!"

"In that you are right," said Ben.

Thereupon, he related what had happened; the three listened breathless; and when he had done, they were filled with delight.

"Oh, it's glorious!" cried the girl, her face flushed, her eyes shining.

"Now, will the Hessians murder honest people in their beds!" said the landlady, her chin up and her arms akimbo. "We'll match them yet, never fear."



The old gentleman reached out until his hand rested upon the boy's sleeve.

"You are of the army?" he asked, very quietly.

"Yes," replied Ben, "a courier and scout attached to the service of General Washington."

"There are so many young officers," said the old man, "that it is not likely that you have met with Lieutenant Claflin."

Ben pondered a moment.

"He is in General Cadwallader's brigade," spoke the girl, her tone now as low as that of her father. "A fair-haired young man, not over large, but strong."

"Claflin," said Ben, thoughtfully. "Oh, yes, I recall him; he seems to be much thought of by General Cadwallader. I saw them riding side by side in the midst of the Pennsylvanians to-day."

"After the battle?" The question was asked by the old gentleman and his daughter at the same instant.

"Why, yes, to be sure. The army was then well beyond Kingston, making for the hills."



The old man cast his eyes upward, fervently; the girl put her arms about his neck.

"There, there," she murmured, "what did I tell you? He is safe; perfectly safe."

After a few moments the old gentleman looked at the boy, who was talking in low tones with the landlady.

"He is my only son," he explained, "and I have been much put out by thoughts of his safety. Indeed, I am now on my way to the camp. I felt that there must soon be a battle, and I desired to see him once more."

They talked, while the landlady laid the table at the fire with her whitest linen and most shining delft.

"My name is Joseph Claflin," said the old man. "I once manufactured iron-mongery of many kinds, but am long since retired."

Ben glanced at him, surprised.

"Not the Joseph Claflin whose foundry is still on the Wissahickon, just above Weiss's Mill?" said he.

"Hah, you know the place then?"

"I ought to, sir, seeing that I was born at no great distance from it. My name is



Cooper, and my father's place is near to the Mennonite Meeting House."

"Attorney Cooper's son! Are you, indeed? Let me shake your hand." The old hands grasped the young ones in a quavering grip. "Why, I have known him these many years; yes, I knew him when he was not greatly older than yourself."

And so when they sat down to the smoking supper by the crackling fire they had many topics in common for discussion. The Claflins now resided in the city proper; but they knew Germantown still, and, so it seemed, frequently visited there.

"But," said Mr. Claflin, "you must call upon us when you get to Philadelphia and have some spare time; our house is on Sassafras Street, not far from Crown, and you will be warmly welcome there at any time."

Miss Betsy Claflin added her invitation to that of her father.

"Perhaps, after the rough life of the camp, we can make you comfortable if even for only a few hours," she said. "So please do not fail, if you have the chance, to drop in on us when you are in the city."



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They talked for a long time after supper, and then Mr. Claflin and his daughter took their candles and retired to their rooms.

"I shall see you, of course, in the morning," said the old gentleman, as they were going. "We will be astir early, for we desire to start as soon as may be on the way to the camp."

After they had retired, Ben sat for a time chatting with the landlady. Then, thinking to go to bed himself, he arose.

"I shall see to my nag," said he, "and then get some sleep while I may."

"As to the horse," replied the hostess, "you may rest easy about him. The hostler, while he isn't of much use when hectoring fellows make trouble in the inn, is an excellent hand with the cattle; I never had a better."

Nevertheless, Ben went to the barn, and there, in the ill light of a lantern suspended from the rafters, he saw the small hostler seated upon a heap of grain sacks, reading an old newspaper. At sight of the lad, the man folded his paper carefully and laid it away. For some little time he sat regarding Ben, as the latter patted his horse and rearranged its bed; then he spoke.



"He was a rare bad fellow, wasn't he?"

Ben turned and looked at him questioningly, for the man with the yellow smile had vanished from his mind.

"Whom do you mean?" he asked.

"Why," said the hostler, his mild eyes wide open, "he that was within there a while ago."

"Oh, yes." Ben laughed. "I suppose he was as bad as may be. But it all depends upon how you take them. You see it turned out that he'll do no more harm to-night."

The other shook his head.

"I am not so sure of that," said he. "There is more goes on of a night on the road than an honest body generally knows of."

Ben stood leaning against his nag, looking at the hostler. The dim rays of light fell upon the man with weird effect; his pale skin, light eyes and reddish hair gave him a most peculiar look.

"It takes them as are familiar with the ways of the road after dark to understand it," said the hostler, with a shake of the head. "No one else can do it. Strange things happen when night shuts everything else out."



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Deeds are done that would make one shudder in the sunlight."

"You are one, I take it—from your talk, who is acquainted with the road after night-fall," said Ben.

The man nodded.

"I am," he replied. "I am, though I don't just know why I should be, as I have no liking for such things and am afraid of them."

"We are not always master of the things that come to us," said the lad. "Perhaps it is not best that we should be."

"It may be so," said the hostler. "But I for one cannot understand it. If I were big of body and had an enterprising mind, I might be able to come to hand grips with some of the people I take note of. But, as it stands, I am neither, and so must content myself with listening and looking and shaking my head."

"How does one come to be acquainted with the road after dark?" asked Ben, curiously. "I have traveled it many times at all hours, and the night hours have seemed much the same as the others to me, except that the going was more difficult."

"The secret of the night road does not come





*"YOU SAW SOMETHING THEN?"*







to one who travels it merely," said the hostler, wisely. "No, no. To get at the heart of it, one must study it, one must lie by its side, staring at it; one must listen to the slightest murmur that stirs it, the smallest thing, the faintest whisper, the tiniest throb of life. He must have eyes that can pierce the darkness and ears that can catch sounds a great way off. And not only must he do all this, but he must be able to understand what he sees and hears and feels."

The speaker arose from the grain sacks, went to the barn window and looked cautiously out. Then he came close to Ben, and continued in a low voice :

"If I had not been able to do all this, how could I have understood what I saw to-night as I came from the mill, a mile beyond the turnpike road?"

"You saw something, then?" said Ben. The lad thought the man, from his queer words, must be slightly demented; but, for all, there was an earnestness about him which compelled attention.

"I not only saw, but I heard," said the hostler in the same low tone. "You see, the



miller holds some grain belonging to the inn to be ground when wanted. And so to-night, after you had driven the bully away, I went to the mill to tell the miller that we'd need more rye on the morrow. I had not reached the main road on the way back, when I saw a thin shadow moving in the lighter shadows of the road; and as I stopped to watch it, I saw a second shadow move out and join the first."

The man paused here, and one of his hands touched Ben upon the arm.

"It was here that my knowledge of the night road was of service. One who knew naught of its secrets would have seen nothing of this, or if they had chanced to see, would have considered it of no moment. But I understood—the shadows could be nothing less than men—men who had met together for some purpose which, perhaps, was not of the best.

"And so," proceeded the hostler, "knowing this, I must know more. They had paused, had the shadows, and it was an easy matter to approach them. There they stood by the roadside, close together, and their voices came clearly to my ears.



“ ‘And,’ said one of them, ‘you thought it well to keep me prowling up and down in the cold while you had your supper?’ ”

“ ‘It was no fault of my own,’ said the second. ‘I hurried the best I could. Indeed, if I had waited until they cooked a supper for me, I would have waited until midnight. As it was, I tried to come by that belonging to another, knowing you’d be awaiting me; and I failed even in that.’ ”

Ben drew in a breath long with interest; the speaker went on:

“The other man laughed. ‘And so you have come out upon the venture with an empty stomach?’ said he.

“ ‘I have,’ replied the other, ‘and all because of a particular friend of yours who entered the inn while I was negotiating the meal.’ At this saying the other seemed puzzled; and the man had to enlighten him. ‘A close friend of yours,’ said he, ‘and one of whom you spoke with some interest to me not many hours ago.’ ”

“Ah,” said Ben Cooper, softly. “And what did he say to that?”

“He was fair astonished, it seemed to me.



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I saw the shadows spring apart, and I saw a movement as though the man had taken out a firearm.

“‘Ah,’ said he, ‘and so he is there! Well, that is a stroke of good fortune that I did not expect. Back you go to this inn, and I with you; we’ll see to this friend of mine at once.’”

“An earnest fellow,” said Ben, quietly. “He would be about his business without delay.”

“But the other checked him,” spoke the hostler; “it would seem that there was other and more pressing work toward. ‘Don’t forget,’ said he, ‘that the hours are passing; and while we are meddling about an inn, wasting time with a boy, the carriage may pass.’”

“The carriage?” said Ben Cooper, and a startled look came into his face.

“‘The carriage may pass,’ were his words,” said the hostler. “And without another instant’s delay the two started off toward the main road, and I saw nothing more of them.”

Ben remained looking at the man for a space; then he asked:



"You don't know what direction they took, then, when they reached the main road?"

"I lost sight of them in the by-road," said the hostler; "but," with some pride, "I can tell you which way they took for all that. My ears made out that they took to the southward."

"A carriage from the direction of Philadelphia," muttered the boy as he crossed the yard to the inn with hasty steps. "And being waited for by a gentleman who is much interested in having harm befall myself. I think," as he pushed open the door, "this is a matter which will bear some little examination."



## CHAPTER VIII

SHOWS HOW BEN COOPER WENT FORTH INTO THE  
NIGHT AND WHAT DISCOVERY HE MADE  
BY THE WAYSIDE

BEN COOPER had left his holster pistols slung from the back of a chair in the public room ; so now when he strode in, took them up and looked at their locks and primings, the good landlady of the inn opened her eyes.

"What now?" she asked. "Has anything gone wrong?"

"Not yet," answered Ben; "but," smiling, "there is no knowing, according to your hostler, what will befall on the road after night."

"Pay no attention to what he says upon that point!" exclaimed the woman. "He is fair mad about it. If he can get any one to listen to his talk about the road, especially the road after dark, he's happy. Pay no attention to him."

"It so chances," said Ben, "that I am much struck by something which he has said,



and have the curiosity to look further into it." He placed the pistols in his belt, and provided himself with ammunition. "I shall, perhaps, be gone some time. If I return after you are all abed, I will not arouse you, so have no fear upon that score. There is hay in the barn loft, I know, and I can make myself comfortable enough in that for a few hours."

The landlady was still expostulating when he departed, and as he walked down the ice-bound road, he heard her calling shrilly to the hostler.

"He's in for a rare, good drubbing," laughed Ben, to himself. "The hostess is a famous scold when she is herself, as I've often heard."

The night was dark and bitterly cold, and the lad drew his greatcoat well about him, and plunged his hands deep into his pockets.

"By all appearances, the carriage is to be met hereabouts," he mused, as he stumbled along. "As they have no horses, it seems reasonable to think that this is so. Therefore, I must be as cautious as I can, for there is no telling where these two worthies may be lurking."

The wind lifted as he went along and



soon he felt damp particles of snow upon his face.

"A storm," said Ben. "I trust it will not block the road, if it prove that I must go on to Philadelphia."

The fall increased; and the wind took up the flakes, whirling them about madly. In a very short time the night began to lighten, for the snow clung to the trees and bush and so mantled the earth as to make things rather plain to be seen.

"I must be more careful than ever now," Ben told himself, his eyes sharply ahead. "If they should chance to be hiding near the road I am sure to be observed."

To prevent this he left the road and began making his way through a thin growth of tall pines. The ground was thick with a carpet of needles, over which lay the light snow, so his footsteps were soft and cat-like. Suddenly ahead there loomed a sort of barrier of boughs, and from behind it came the faint sparkle of fire.

With increased caution the boy advanced, and as he drew near to the boughs, he caught the murmur of a voice. The sound continued,



and Ben fancied that it must be some persons engaged in conversation ; but upon approaching the sound he was astonished to discover that it was some one singing.

“ Oh, ye Irish lads of fair renown,  
Come listen unto me,  
And I'll relate a bitter fate  
That happened on the sea.  
It was in the dark December  
Upon the Baltic coast ——”

Just what happened upon the Baltic coast is something of a mystery, for at that point the singing broke off and a voice was raised in lamentation.

“ Oh, by this and by that,” it said, “ is there ne'er a stick of dry wood in all America to keep a poor gossoon from freezing to the marrow? Faith, here I am with sorra the coat to me back, and the wind whistlin' a jig tune about me two ears. Oh, worra, worra, why didn't they leave me stop at home in Ireland where I was happy, and not bring me to this place to fight the poor people who only ax the right to live dacently.”

In a little flare cast by the fire, Ben saw a round-headed, well-built lad, with a shock of



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sandy hair and an honest, comical-looking face. He was grubbing among the brush for something to add to his fire, but apparently all that was not frozen to the ground was wet by the snow, and he was meeting with but poor success. However, in spite of this, and with his teeth chattering, he began to sing once more.

“ ’Twas in the hills of Wicklow  
First I saw the light of day,  
And, my father’s cabin round,  
I, as a child, did play.  
Until one morning in the spring ——”

What occurred on this particular morning must take its place beside the episode of the Baltic coast; for once more did the singer stop, and break forth into complaining:

“ ’S’cure to the dry chip is there anywhere. Oh, then must I get my death, entirely, in a strange place and with people all about who think me a thief of the world because I fought on the side of the Sassanach? Bless us and save us! It’s rather fight against them I would, any time, than for them.”

At this point Ben stepped around the barrier of boughs and into the circle of light cast



by the fire. The sandy-haired youth leaped up and seized a cudgel which was lying beside him ; whirling it about his head, he cried boldly enough :

“ Stop where you are, or by this and by that, you’ll have this lump of a stick clattering about the head of you ! ”

Ben stood smilingly regarding him.

“ How did you make your way all the distance without being found out ? ”

The other, seeing that, at least, no immediate attack was meditated, lowered his bludgeon.

“ What’s that you say ? ” he demanded.

“ I ask you, how did you get so far from Trenton without being discovered ? ”

“ From Trenton, is it ? ” cautiously. “ And, sure, who told you I come from Trenton ? ”

“ The clothes you wear,” said Ben, as he sat down upon a log. “ You threw the coat away because it was red ; but the other things tell just as plainly that you are a British soldier.”

Here the cudgel was grasped firmly once more, and the sandy-haired lad took a step forward.

“ Is it me that you call such a name ? ” demanded he. “ Is it Paddy Burk that you



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call by so disgraceful a title? True for you, I did wear the red coat, and true again that I threw it in a ditch—because I hated it. But never was I a British soldier. I was an Irish boy compelled to wear a British soldier's clothes, but never for a minute was I anything less."

"You are a deserter, then," said Ben.

"I left them just as honestly as they enlisted me. There was I at home, a raw boy, knowing nothing and listening to the tales the dragoon sergeant told of foreign parts. And when he handed me the 'shilling,' I took it thinking he only meant to be generous with me, and never dreaming that it made me a redcoat."

"I've heard that they do such things," said Ben.

"And then off they took me," lamented Paddy Burk. "Off they took me to a big town and put me on board a ship with dozens more like me, and over we came to America as British soldiers—a thing we never thought to be."

"You were with the army of Cornwallis, I suppose," said Ben.



"Yes," replied the other. "I was with him till he reached the place where they tried to cross the bridge, and the Americans drove them back. It was yesterday, I think. Then I got a good chance and took leg bail for it across the river on the ice. And," with feeling, "here I am wandering about with never a bite nor sup since then ; and it's fair weak with the hunger I am."

There was a moment's silence, then Ben Cooper spoke.

"You don't like the British service, then?"

"Like it!" The sandy-haired lad gripped his cudgel in both hands. "Sure, and how could any one with Irish blood in his veins like it?"

"Perhaps," said Ben, "you'd prefer that of America."

The cudgel was lowered and an interested look appeared upon the face of the boy.

"Now that," said he, "is a different thing. I would have tried to find General Washington's army, but I was afeered to go back across the river." He stared at Ben, anxiously. "Maybe now it's yourself that could tell me how to find it."



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"Well," said Ben, "one of the first things that should be done in your case is to get you warm and provide you with some food. Then we can think of the rest."

The face of the Irish boy brightened up wonderfully.

"Arrah, then it's the great lad ye are!" he cried, with admiration. "Sure, a bite to eat and a fire with a trifle of heat in it would be as welcome as the sun in the morning."

"But," proceeded Ben, "before I can do anything else, I must first see to a matter of great importance. As for you," and he pointed in the direction of the road, "take that way until you come to an inn, less than a mile away. Say to the landlady that ——"

Here the other interrupted him.

"Ah, sure, it would make no matter what I'd say to her. It would be all the same, faith. She'd up with the broom and drive me away from the door for a vagabond."

"But ——" said Ben, and again he was interrupted.

"Wherever you do be going," said Paddy Burk, "let me go with you; and when we come to a place where there's a bit of comfort



to be had, sure, then, you can speak for me yourself."

Seeing that the lad was fixed in his belief that no one would receive him if his plea were unsupported, Ben's mind was instantly made up.

"Come, then," said he, arising, "and make yourself ready for a little adventure."

"Ah," said Paddy Burk, and he passed his hand lovingly over the length of his stout club, "that would be another name for a 'ruction,' I'm thinking. Well, by this and by that, when there's such to the fore, no one ever saw Paddy Burk stand back and look on."

Ben laughed.

"Perhaps, Paddy," said he, "you'll get your fill of 'ructions,' as you call them; for there is something ahead which promises well in that direction."

In a few moments they had put out the fire and were trudging away under the trees, the wind whirling the snow about their faces and into their eyes. Ben kept his bearings and never allowed himself to get far from the road; indeed, he skirted it very closely, his companion trudging along at his side.



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Suddenly the latter said :

“Whist! What is that beyant there? Is it a house, I dunno, or is it somebody carrying a light?”

At almost the same moment Ben had perceived the dim spark through the falling snow.

“It is moving,” said he, “and that shows that it is a light that is being carried.” They paused for a time and watched the spark.

“It is slowly growing brighter,” commented Ben, “and that proves that it is coming toward us.”

A little more observation showed that the light must be upon the road.

“Many’s the time I’ve seen the lights coming on that way on the night before market day at Ballysampson,” said Paddy Burk. “They’d move a weeny bit this way, and a small bit that way, according to the turns in the road, and all the time they’d be a-blinking like a one-eyed dragon out of a fairy book.”

Ben, with a sharp intaking of the breath, drew out his pistols. The other perceived the action in the dim light thrown up by the snow.



"Ah, ha," said he, "and so here is where the ruction starts. Well," with a brisk whirl of his cudgel, "the sooner the better, for a trifle of exercise would warm me, so it would."

"The first point I must warn you on is to keep silence," said Ben, one hand uplifted. "A wagon or carriage is expected at any time, bearing matters of moment for the American camp. I have reason to think that it is to be stopped near here."

"And you think," said Paddy Burk, in a whisper, "that this, with the light, may be the carriage?"

"I do," replied Ben Cooper. "But come, let us make our way to the roadside."

They turned at a sharp angle and started for the road; and as they reached it there came a sudden shout; a pistol shot rang out, and the moving lamp came to a stand far down the snowy road.

With the pistols gripped in his hands, Ben ran forward; as he neared the halted vehicle, he saw a man climbing down from a high seat, and another holding a pistol at his head. In the snow lay a dark, huddled form, and



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over it stood a man in a long greatcoat, his hands stuffed into his pockets.

“Have mercy, good folk,” whined the man, climbing down from the driver’s seat. “Take pity upon one who never did you harm.”

The man with the pistol answered with a brutal kick, at which the other howled loudly.

“Now hold your tongue, or you’ll get worse than that,” said the man with the pistol.

“The money is here—safe in the bags,” cried the coward. “Don’t harm me and I will show you where to find it.”

He was creeping toward the carriage once more when Ben Cooper’s first pistol exploded, and missed. The man who had kicked the driver whirled about savagely, but the second pistol laid him low; then the youth dropped both empty weapons in the road and leaped for the man in the greatcoat.

This person, however, stepped back, so as to avoid the full force of the rush; then he lifted an empty pistol which he held in his hand, and dropped it skilfully upon the boy’s head. Ben staggered beneath the shock of the blow; the pistol lifted to repeat, but the lad, shaken though he was, dodged, and in an-



other instant had seized the other round the body.

The man in the greatcoat was powerfully made, and did not hesitate to grapple with his foe ; but in spite of his great strength he found in the boy a supple, eel-like quality that made him difficult to master. Then to make matters worse for him, he stumbled over the prostrate form in the road and went down with the boy upon him. In an instant Ben had planted a knee in his chest, and gripped him about the throat.

All this had taken but a moment ; and as Ben clung to his antagonist he felt a glow of triumph. But in this he was premature, for just then the man who had gone down under his pistol shot arose to his feet, the blood streaming from a wound in his scalp, and lurched toward the boy. It would have gone hard with the latter had not fortune favored him that night. Cramped by the cold and weakened by hunger, Paddy Burk had labored along a score or more paces in the rear. But now, as the newly arisen man was dragging Ben Cooper from the one he held pinned to the ground, the Irish lad was upon him with



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a whoop; the cudgel twirled gaily and the man dropped to the road once more.

"Up on the seat with you," directed Paddy, glaring at the driver.

But the speaker's face looked so distorted in the dim lantern light that the driver was stricken with fear and could not move.

"Then I'll up for you," said Paddy, promptly. "Inside with you," to Ben, who stood still dazed from the blow he had received; "and as for you," pointing his bludgeon at the man with the greatcoat, who was scrambling out of the snow, "keep your distance, or by this and by that, I'll give you a taste of the stick that you'll not like."

With that he leaped upon the seat of the vehicle, and grasped the reins; Ben, after a bewildered glance within that showed him a heap of canvas bags snugly tucked away in a corner, stumbled in and dropped upon a seat. Then with a yell at the now plunging horses, the Irish lad waved his cudgel above his head.

"Away with you, my beauties," he cried; "sure it is mesilf that will give you a loose



rein all the way to General Washington's camp if need be."

And so away they tore with their precious load, the lantern swaying madly, the carriage pitching from side to side.



## CHAPTER IX

### DEALS WITH THE ARRIVAL OF GILBERT MOTIER, MARQUIS DE LAFAYETTE

THE dawn was well past when Ben Cooper and Paddy Burk dashed up before the Freemasons Tavern at Morristown in the carriage containing the fifty thousand dollars in silver and gold coin sent by Robert Morris. Word was at once carried to the commander-in-chief by the officer in charge; then the bags were carried into the building and placed safely under guard.

General Washington was at breakfast some hours later when Ben and the Irish lad were sent in, in response to his request. He received Ben kindly and thanked him with the utmost warmth for his gallant conduct. The lad, when given the opportunity, told Paddy Burk's story as to how he was impressed into the British army, of his desertion, and of his rare courage in the rescue of the money bags.

"If it had not been for him, Your Excel-



lency," said young Cooper, "all that I attempted would have gone for nothing. He's one of the bravest fellows I ever saw, and," eagerly, "he would like to join with us against the British."

Paddy's hand went to his forelock by way of salute.

"It's not like as if I were playing the traitor to them, your honor," he said. "For sorra the one of them had any right to me; they got me by deception, and if I made away from them by the same means, small blame to me."

The commander smiled.

"Do you desire to join with us?" he asked.

"I do, if you please, your honor—that is, if I can join the troop that Misther Cooper is with, sir."

"I dare say it can be arranged," smiled the general. "You seem to be of the character needed for a scout and courier." He turned to an officer near by. "Attend to this, Harrison, if you please."

The general's secretary accordingly led the Irish lad out of the inn; and before long he was duly added to the scouts in the service of



headquarters. Nat Brewster, Ezra and George Prentiss and the Porcupine took to their new comrade at once; and his shrewd sayings, comical manners and quaint songs added to the good feeling the more they saw of him.

After this there were no large movements for a long time; Washington established posts completely across the Jerseys, connecting with the forts on the Hudson highlands. The temporary halting place proved to be just the spot for a winter quarters, and being almost equally near to Amboy, Brunswick and Newark, was a most excellent place from which to carry on a system of forays, raids and other harassing movements; the hills and dense forests afforded an almost complete protection from counter attacks of a serious nature.

Slowly the winter wore on; brilliant exploits marked it from time to time; the American troops became a terror to the British, who were not only driven out of the Jerseys, but were compelled to keep to one or two very narrowly defined districts.

The British government was making vast preparations for the coming campaign in the spring, however. More Hessians were being



brought to take the place of those captured at Trenton. Burgoyne was coming to head a powerful army which was to invade the country from Canada; General Howe and his brother, the admiral, were formulating a scheme which would give them Philadelphia, while Sir Henry Clinton spent the time planning an ascent of the Hudson and a blow at the Highland forts. If these latter could be taken and the stronghold at West Point passed, Clinton could join his army to that of Burgoyne and so split the struggling states in two, neither part of which could lend help to the other.

When Howe began to show signs of life, Washington broke up his camp at Morristown, and took up a position at Middlebrook, where he would be more in touch with the movements of that leader. Once Howe tried to engulf Sullivan at Princeton; again he endeavored to tempt Washington to try a general engagement. But in neither of these did he succeed, and so he began to plan once more with the admiral for the taking of Philadelphia.

During this period Ben Cooper saw quite a



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little of Philadelphia life. The business of the army frequently took him there, and often he had permission to spend some little time.

Distinguished foreigners, attracted by the struggle for independence, were pouring into the city; public and social circles were besieged by them; demands, highly preposterous for the most part, were made by heretofore unknown persons for commissions; men who had not been of higher grade than captain in the armies of Europe now treated with contempt any suggestion save that which carried with it the rank, at least, of general of brigade.

During the early summer Ben was enjoying a fortnight's leave of absence with his father at Germantown; and one day he received a letter from Miss Betsy Claflin. He had met the Claflins frequently since the night at the inn at Burlington, and had become very intimate with them all.

"We are to give a very grand dinner at the City Tavern," wrote Betsy, "and we are to have such a number of distinguished people present that I shall be dreadfully frightened,



I know. And so I shall need all my friends to give me courage, and feel sure that I can count upon you for one."

There was a great deal more to the note, telling him the names of the notables who were to grace the feast, not the least among whom was Washington himself. The time set was but a few nights off, and Miss Betsy apologized for the lateness of the invitation because: "I had not known but that you were with the army, otherwise this would have reached you much sooner."

The City Tavern was the fashionable place of the city at that day, and many splendid affairs were held between its walls; and so, when the night arrived, Ben spent a great deal of time over his toilet, and made his way with much magnificence to the inn. It was brilliantly lighted; there appeared to be candles everywhere; beautifully gowned ladies and men in striking uniforms, or the courtly dress of the period, filled the rooms.

Ben was warmly greeted by Lieutenant Claflin, Betsy's brother, by that young lady herself and by their father.



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"Hah, you young rascal," quavered the old gentleman, as he clung to Ben's hand. "I've just been talking to General Greene, and I begin to find out about you. Why have you not told me of your reputation as a fire-eater, sir; why have I not heard before of these exploits of yourself and your friends?"

Ben laughed.

"Oh, General Greene likes his little joke, sir," remonstrated he. "He loves to make much of these little matters of experience."

"Ah, you rogue, you can't deceive me. You are a hero, sir, that's what you are. And not only General Greene tells me so, but others as well."

Here Miss Betsy and some other young ladies took Ben in charge and stationing themselves in an excellent place for observation, began to point out all the noted figures of the day, who were as yet unknown to the camp. A handsome, rather reckless-looking man of middle size and carrying himself with a swaggering, dragoon-like air, attracted the attention of the lad in a very few moments.

"And who is that?" he inquired.



"It's Colonel Conway," replied one of the girls. "He was born in Ireland, but has lived most of his life in France."

"A very gallant and capable officer, I have heard," remarked another.

"He may be all you say, but I don't care for him," spoke a third. "There is something about him which is repelling."

"Some of the members of Congress do not find him so," said Betsy Claflin, wisely. "He has only been in the country a short time, but already there is quite a movement in his favor. I have heard it said that there are some who think of raising him at once to an important command."

The young lady who had first spoken now turned a cautious look about to note if any one were paying attention whom she did not take into her confidence. Her voice was very low and her manner profoundly secret as she said :

"Pray don't breathe a word of this to a living soul, for I had it privately and in strict confidence. Congress was to make Colonel Conway a brigadier, but General Washington interfered, and said that he thought him an



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unsafe man and scarcely to be trusted with an important command."

There was an astonished buzz at this, and then an outbreak of low-voiced chatter. During this Ben was observing Conway; he, too, felt repelled by the man's swaggering, arrogant manner, though he had not yet overheard a word he said. Suddenly, as he watched he saw a tall man with powerful features approach the Irish-Frenchman; they greeted each other eagerly, and as they did so Ben watched the tall man with eyes full of interested recognition. After a moment or two of watching he turned to Betsy.

"And who is that, so closely engaged with Colonel Conway?"

Betsy glanced at the person indicated.

"That is a gentleman from the South," she said. "Savannah, I think, is his town; and he has been attracted by the Congress and other things, perhaps, in the city most of the winter. He is a great friend of Samuel Livingstone, the merchant. They have known each other a great while, or at least I think I've heard it so said. His name is Tobias Hawkins."



Ben regarded Tobias Hawkins for a moment more.

"Master Samuel Livingstone vouched for the gentleman, eh?" he said, musingly.

Betsy looked at him in surprise.

"Why, yes," she said. "And why not, seeing that they are such old friends?"

"Ah, why not, indeed?" said Ben.

For a long time he sat with moody face; this was unusual for him, for cheerfulness was his leading characteristic. The girls strove to arouse him, but he would emerge from his abstraction only for a moment at a time; the next would see him with folded arms staring at the floor, or regarding Master Hawkins with fixed and speculative eye.

Later in the evening he was chatting with Lieutenant Claflin, and some others, when he noted a tall, fine-looking officer go by; and at his side was Tobias Hawkins, smiling and genial, and apparently relating some witticism—for the officer, as they passed, laughed gaily.

"Gates is a handsome fellow," said a civilian youth to one of the young officers in the group. "And a good-humored one, I think."



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The young officer grimaced.

"I have served under him," he said. "And I found him good-humored if one played the jester to him. With the sun shining, give me Gates; but with an overcast sky, I would prefer some more stable person."

The young civilian looked astonished.

"Why," said he, "is it possible that General Gates is not thought highly of in the army? I take from your tone that you meant that," in hurried explanation.

"I did mean it," smiled the youthful officer. "Gates has the military knowledge—no one can deny that—but," and the speaker tapped his forehead with one finger, "it is here that he is deficient. He has not the judgment, the depth, that ability to apply his knowledge which makes the general."

Lieutenant Claflin laughed, as did some others.

"Oh, come now, Hungerford," said Claflin, "don't be so severe upon the general. Remember, he has been engaged in military service of one sort or another for only thirty years, while you have worn a sword for as long a time as six months."



Again there was a laugh, and young Hungerford flushed.

"As for that," said he, frankly enough, "I am not passing personal judgment upon General Gates. I am merely stating what I know are the opinions of men of experience. Why, General Washington himself holds him in no high esteem, for some time ago when Gates asked for a brigade, he refused to give it to him, there being others in whom he had more faith."

Ben's eyes followed the handsome figure of Gates and that of Tobias Hawkins; and once more the moody look came into his face.

"What can it mean?" he asked himself. "What is this man's purpose? He has pushed himself into the good graces of a rather simple-minded merchant, and so has gained entry into the society of the city. And what I noted on the first night at this very inn has since been verified. For some reason he then was eager to know the names of those opposed to General Washington, and since then all those with whom I have seen him upon intimate terms are of that stripe. First, there was Mifflin, who is noted for his dislike of the



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general, then there is Conway, and now Gates." The boy looked down the long room at the two men and his thoughts went on : " He has some reason. His desire must be to ——"

Here he was interrupted by a general movement toward the room where the dinner was to be served, and he found himself paired with a dark-haired, bright-eyed girl whose English pronunciation proved her to be of French birth. At the table this young lady proved to be a most diverting companion. She knew every one and the history of every one.

" I am at great pains to acquire information," she smilingly told Ben. " For, you see, I am keeping a journal in which I write down every scrap of intelligence. In years to come it will be a highly-prized book ; even scholars will go to it when they desire a true picture of these days."

Listening to her chatter pleased Ben Cooper, and soon all thought of Tobias Hawkins had passed out of his mind. Almost across the table from them were a number of foreigners who had come to America in search of military preferment. One of these was manifestly of German extraction, a grave-faced man of



middle age; another was a handsome lad of about Ben's own years. The latter was laughing gaily with those near him and talking in English, but with a decided French accent.

"That," said Ben, "is a countryman of yours."

His companion shrugged her shoulders, helplessly.

"One sees so many countrymen of mine these days, that it might be thought Congress intended to officer the American army from France," she said. "And some of them—oh, what preposterous fellows they are! So much pretense, so much vainglory. It is really ridiculous."

Ben had his eyes upon the engaging countenance of the French lad across the table.

"That one, at least," said he, "has none of those things."

The girl nodded her agreement of this.

"He is very well, indeed," she said. "I have met him, and my father has told me his family history."

Just then the young Frenchman burst out in his imperfect English:

"But such a wonderful country—so beauti-



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ful a land. It is well to fight that such a country should be free. I am lost in admiration of it."

"But, sir," laughingly protested one of the ladies, "you have been here a very short time, and you can have seen but little of it."

"Ah, madame, there you are mistaken," cried the lad, delightedly. "I have seen nine hundred miles of it, my friends and I. Nine hundred miles did we ride from Georgetown in South Carolina, where my ship reached port. Nine hundred miles through a glorious country; and the sight of it day after day, madame, made me more determined than ever to join your army and help fight for it."

"You say you know his name and history," said Ben Cooper to the girl at his side. "Who and what is he?"

"He was born in Cavanac, Auvergne, France," said the young lady with affected solemnity, "and he is now just nineteen years of age. His name is——" she paused and affected great concern. "Do you care to hear his full name?" she asked.

"Full and complete, so that I may know the worst at once," smiled Ben.



“Very well, then. It is Marie Jean Paul Roch Yves Gilbert Motier, Marquis de Lafayette. He is enormously rich, has been a captain of dragoons, and has made very great sacrifices at home in France that he might come here and offer his sword to Congress.”

Ben regarded the young Frenchman with increased attention.

“Why,” said the American boy, “here is a generous and unselfish spirit, indeed. To leave a great fortune, honors, no doubt——”

“All that the French king could confer upon one so young,” put in the girl. “But no, he would have none of it. He had heard of the struggle here, and asked Mr. Franklin at Paris for service. After the defeat of Long Island the Americans had no credit in Europe; no one believed in them, it seems, and so Mr. Franklin could secure no ship to carry the French boy and his friends.

“‘We are sorry,’ said Franklin, ‘but you will have to await our better fortune.’

“But not so! He could not wait. He bought a ship of his own and set sail; and here he is, offering himself to Congress, to fight the British.”



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After dinner the young Marquis and Ben Cooper were presented to each other, and when the French lad learned that Ben was upon active service with Washington he was delighted.

"You cannot understand," said he, "how we admire this general of yours in Europe. The great Frederic of Prussia says that his strategy stamps him as the world's greatest soldier."

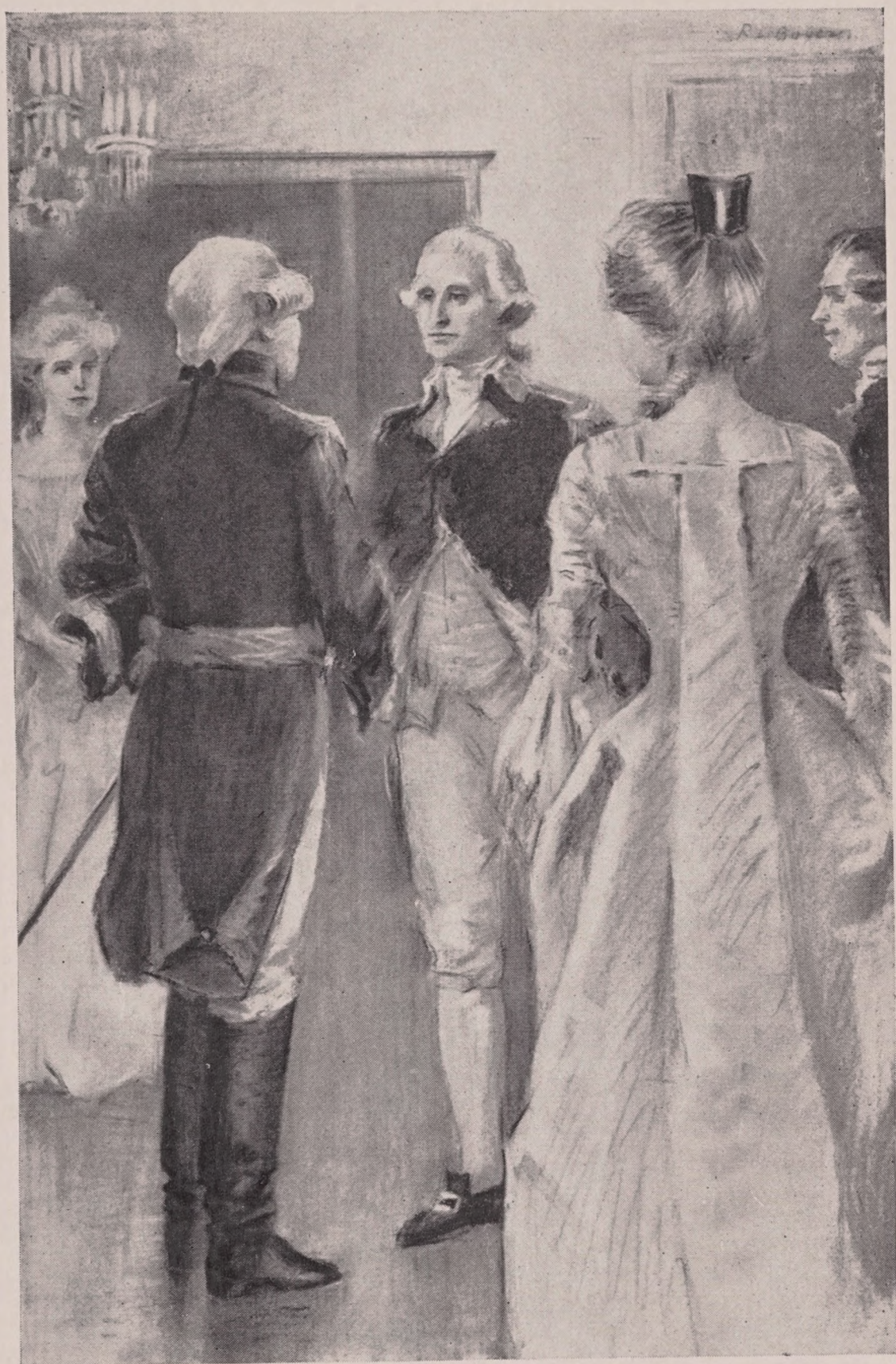
The two were still deeply engaged, Ben relating some camp anecdotes of the commander-in-chief, to Lafayette's vast admiration, when there was a stir, a rustle, a hum of voices, a crowding to the front; but neither of the young men paid any attention; until, after a little, the voice of old Mr. Claflin said:

"What, Marquis, I thought you were wild to meet our general. And here he is and you have not even so much as a look for him."

Turning, his face alight, the next moment Lafayette was face to face with Washington for the first time, and listening to the calm, steady voice which he was afterward to hear so often in the press of battle.

Soon there was quite a throng about the





**L**AFAYETTE WAS FACE TO FACE  
WITH WASHINGTON







two. The fame of the young nobleman, who so loved freedom that he would give up all that most men covet in order that he might cross a sea and strike a blow for a stranger race, was all about the city. For the most part the foreigners who offered themselves were professional soldiers who sought the power and emoluments of rank. But here was one wholly different; he already had rank and fortune; he desired only to serve.

The admiration of Washington was plainly visible; he applauded this youth for his unselfishness; he loved him from the first for his high heart and noble generosity.

But on the outskirts of the throng there was a little group in which no sympathy for the meeting seemed to find a place. In this party Ben saw the cold face of General Mifflin, the vain, handsome countenance of General Gates, and the reckless, selfish one of Colonel Conway. These three gazed at the little scene before them with eyes totally unresponsive; they whispered, exchanged looks of unbelief and smiles which scarcely concealed the sneers behind them. These things alone aroused Ben Cooper's resentment; but there was a chill



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at his heart, a feeling of vague fear, as he saw the satisfaction upon the face of the man in the rear of the three. And that man was Master Tobias Hawkins.



## CHAPTER X

SHOWS HOW THE FIGHT AT BRANDYWINE WAS  
LOST, AND HOW BEN BORE THE TIDINGS TO  
PHILADELPHIA

HAVING made up his mind that nothing could be gained by seeking to draw Washington into a trap, General Howe finally decided upon a plan and embarked his troops. What he would do was a matter for speculation in the American army; every one wondered where the next blow would fall. Thinking that Philadelphia must be the point aimed at, Washington once more crossed the Delaware and took up a position at Germantown. While here the tidings came that the British troop ships had entered Chesapeake Bay, and that Howe's army would disembark at the head of the Elk River.

At this news the Tories in Philadelphia became overbold, and thinking to put them down by a display of power, Washington on the way southward marched his army through



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Front and along Chestnut Streets with bands playing and colors flying. There were some twelve thousand of them, while the British, whom they were advancing to check, numbered almost twenty thousand, with powerful artillery.

The Americans marched to Wilmington, and there entered camp upon some heights near to the Christiana and the Brandywine. Heavy parties were sent forward to come in touch with the enemy and harass his advance as much as possible. Howe landed his force at a point seventy miles from Philadelphia, and almost at once took up his line of march. The militia and other parties sent out by Washington rendered this progress much slower than it would otherwise have been, and in this way the American commander was given an opportunity to reconnoiter the roads and passes and fords.

"It looks," said George Prentiss to Ben, "as though the general had made up his mind to risk a battle in the open."

"He must, if he is to fight at all, I think," said Ben. "And that he must fight is settled. Philadelphia, the city where Congress



meets, must not be allowed to fall without a blow."

"Right," spoke Nat Brewster. "That would never do, as I look at it. Everything must be risked at this point; to desert the city, now that the enemy are approaching it, would be to lose its confidence forever."

Talk of this sort ran through the American force, showing that the rank and file understood the position in which their officers stood. And the position was a most critical one. The great bulk of the army was made up of raw men, the militia of New Jersey, Pennsylvania and Delaware; and in no way was the American force to be compared to the British—neither in number, equipment nor discipline.

At White Clay Creek, General Maxwell's sharpshooters encountered the British vanguard, and a spirited fight took place, the sharpshooters falling back, but the invaders meeting with much the greater loss. At first Washington selected a position on the east of Red Clay Creek, on the Philadelphia road; but he discovered the intention of Sir William Howe to pass the Brandywine, gain the heights



to the north of the stream and so cut him off from Philadelphia; the American army was put in motion during the night and took possession of this point.

There were several crossings of the Brandywine and the best of them was in direct line with the enemy's advance. This was called Chadd's Ford, and here Washington stationed the main body of his army under Wayne, Weedon and Muhlenberg. Maxwell's riflemen were also placed at this point, and Wayne's and Proctor's artillery were placed upon a hill commanding the ford. The right wing was in the care of General Sullivan, Sterling and Stephen, while the left, mainly militia, was commanded by General Armstrong.

What seemed to be the main body of the enemy began an advance on Chadd's Ford early on the morning of September 11th. Washington rode along the ranks cheering his men and being cheered in return. The reports of the rifles of Maxwell's men soon began to be heard across the Brandywine; after a long time spent in skirmishing, the sharpshooters themselves were driven across the stream. The enemy did not attempt to follow, but



their artillery opened, and the American guns answered promptly.

While this was going on a rider from General Sullivan's command dashed up to headquarters bearing the news that a heavy body of troops under Howe was pushing along the Lancaster road with the intent to cross at one of the upper fords and turn the American right flank. Instantly a party of riders were sent to ascertain the truth of this; then the Americans determined to cross the creek and attack those before them, word being sent to both wings to do likewise. But just as the movement was begun, word came by a militia major that there was no enemy in the quarter Howe was reported to be in, and instantly Washington halted the troops once more. Horsemen were scurrying backward and forward—all was in suspense. Finally a resident of the section, Squire Cheyney, came galloping up, breathless, and with horse covered with foam; he had come upon the main body of the British as they were hurrying along on the east side of the stream; they had fired upon him, but he had succeeded in reaching the American lines unhurt.



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“ You must move, General Washington,” he cried, “ or you will be surrounded.”

The horsemen, sent out earlier, now returned, confirming this. The British main body, under Cornwallis, was sweeping down upon the right wing. Without hesitation, Washington's orders were given. Sullivan was to attack the invaders, Sterling's and Stephen's brigades were to support him. Wayne was to hold Chadd's Ford and see to it that the German Knyphausen did not cross, while General Greene was to hold his command ready to dash in wherever needed.

Sullivan followed his orders, but the time which had elapsed between the warning and the orders reaching him enabled Cornwallis to select his own ground. Taken at a complete disadvantage, the Americans broke on each wing; the center stood firm, but receiving the concentrated fire of the enemy, it, too, gave way. The young Lafayette, who had begged permission to go where the fight would be thickest, seeing that the pursuing British became entangled in the wood, leaped from his horse and made a gallant attempt to rally the broken division of Sullivan.



“He proves true under the guns of the enemy,” spoke Nat Brewster, admiringly.

Ben Cooper paused and wiped away the perspiration which streamed from his face.

“I knew he would, the first time I ——” Suddenly he stopped and uttered a cry; then both he and Nat drove spurs to their horses and raced forward.

As Lafayette strove with the disorganized rabble of fleeing militia, a mass of British suddenly appeared, emerging from the wood; their pieces sent a volley into the fugitives, and at the discharge Lafayette fell. Side by side Ben Cooper and the stalwart Nat Brewster swept forward; as they neared the young Frenchman they opened a trifle, then bending simultaneously, their horses slowing, they lifted him from the ground, swung him across Nat’s horse—turned in the very teeth of the oncoming British, and sped away.

Washington came up with fresh troops, and the Americans made a stand upon a hill near Dilworth; but again they were driven back with much loss.

Knyphausen, hearing the heavy firing, which was his signal to move in earnest, made



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a rush to cross Chadd's Ford. Wayne's and Proctor's artillery began to sound and Maxwell's riflemen picked off the advance. General Greene was also preparing to oppose the oncoming German, when Ezra Prentiss rode up with orders from the commander-in-chief that he come to the aid of the right wing, which was in desperate peril.

Without the waste of a moment the division of Greene was put into motion and never was there more rapid marching. It is said that the brigade covered the distance of five miles in less than fifty minutes. But, for all his gallant effort, he was too late to prevent defeat. However, he was well in time to cover the retreat; with his field pieces well planted he kept up a steady fire; again and again his ranks opened to allow the blocks of fugitives to pass to the rear. It was a spot selected by Washington the day before as an excellent one for a stand should the army be driven from its first position, and right well did it prove his judgment.

Cornwallis, flushed with success, came on with the exultation of a victor; he had seen the Americans running away, and thought in



the pursuit to deal them a fatal blow. But Greene with his guns, and Muhlenberg's and Weedon's brigades met them fairly and drove them back repeatedly. Finally the British became so exhausted that Greene saw his opportunity and drew off his men in an orderly manner ; and so threatening were his guns, so desperate the aspect of his grim ranks that the enemy did not make any effort at pursuit. Wayne also had kept his opponents back at the ford ; and he, too, now drew off his force in such perfect order that Knyphausen did not dare to follow.

With the Chester road so well covered as to prevent any calamity, Washington, after a consultation with his generals, wrote a dispatch giving a full account of the day's fortunes and misfortunes, knowing well that a horde of panic-stricken runaways would soon burst into Philadelphia and spread the news of utter rout.

“ Ride with all speed and deliver this to Mr. Hancock,” said the general, upon handing the dispatch to Ben Cooper. “ And do what you can to stem the tide of false reports that will be going about.” Then as Ben saluted



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and gathered up his reins, the commander-in-chief added anxiously, to General Greene, "I trust no disorder arises in the city; there are, as you know, many who would willingly take advantage of so rich an opportunity."

As Ben sped along the Chester road, his horse pushed its way, in places, through dense masses of retreating soldiers; the broken fragments of the army, also field pieces and baggage wagons were flowing along in one disorganized stream, all making for Philadelphia. At Chester, some dozen miles north of the scene of battle, was a good sized stream which the fugitives would have to cross to reach the city. Here young Lafayette placed a strong guard at the bridge and refused to permit any one to cross unless properly armed with an order from some one in authority.

With his leg swathed in bandages showing where the bullet had struck him, the youthful Frenchman sat his horse with much difficulty. However, sit him he did, and gave his orders like one born to the work, never betraying a sign of pain. He recognized Ben at once as he came up and replied to his salute, and in-



quired anxiously as to the complexion of things at Dilworth.

"General Greene held them until the danger was past," replied Ben, cheerfully. "And it looks now as though the situation were well in hand."

"Ah, yes," Lafayette said. "With us there was fortune at any rate. We lost the battle, but," and he gestured eloquently, "we are saved from utter ruin; and another day we can fight again."

Ben pushed on at top speed; all along the road he found wagons loaded with household goods and such like, with excited men, white-faced women and crying children trudging at their sides. The news of the defeat had reached them, also the report that Washington's army had been cut to pieces and was flying in complete rout before the British. The lad did his best to steady the men by crying out to them that Washington was holding Howe in check.

As he passed into the city he found much the same state of things; all day the citizens had gathered in the streets and public squares, listening to the roar of the cannon which



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came plainly to their ears; and now the fleeing families grew more numerous; terror seemed to be in every face. The throngs recognized Ben in a moment as being one from the battle-field; they closed around him demanding tidings.

"What news?" called one.

"How goes the fight?" demanded another.

"What's left of the army?" questioned a third.

"How soon will the British be here?" cried another.

Ben waved a hand to them—the hand which held his dispatches.

"Make way," he cried out, repeatedly. "Make way for the messenger to Congress."

"The battle! the battle!" chorused the populace. "What news from the army?"

"The army was driven back——" A groan interrupted the boy. He continued: "But the British were repulsed at last. The army is safe!"

The more hardy spirits found comfort in this last; but the greater part lost none of their fear; the steady stream of fleeing families still passed along the streets; men



rushed hither and thither, preparing to depart, women sobbed and gathered their children about them.

“To the mountains,” was the cry. “To the mountains!”

Ben leaped from his horse at the State-House door; but upon inquiry he learned that Congress was not sitting as he had expected it to be in such a crisis. It had held a session that evening and decided to quit the city; the next meeting of the body was to be held at Lancaster.

“But,” said the custodian, “a number of the members are now at Clark’s Inn, just across the way; and I feel sure that you’ll find Mr. Hancock there, also.”

Clark’s Inn was a quaint and ancient place, almost as old as the city itself; the doors stood wide and the light streamed out upon the stone-paved walk. Within, all was hubbub; the day’s misfortunes were, of course, the chief topic, but the decision of Congress to quit the city was almost as much discussed.

“What do I call it, sir?” were the first words that come to Ben’s ears as he entered the inn. “What do I call it, do you say?”



Why, I call it cowardice, sir, rank cowardice."

The speaker was the stout Master Samuel Livingstone, whom Ben had met with several times before. His face was mottled with excitement, and one fat hand beat the table before him.

"Not cowardice, perhaps," said the person to whom he addressed himself. "Not cowardice, exactly, but rather unseemly haste."

"It is cowardice, sir!" maintained Master Livingstone. "It is just that, and nothing less! Was it not Congress who brought us all to the point of resistance to the king? Was it not, I ask of you? And now that we have resisted to the extent of all we have, what does Congress do?" He paused, and his great face glowered at the man to whom he was speaking. "It deserts us! No sooner does it hear of the enemy's approach to the city than it deserts us. The moment that the slightest chance of danger to itself appears, it flies."

Here the other man held up a warning finger; bending across the table he said something in a low tone. Master Livingstone



grew a little paler in color ; his manner took on a trace of anxiety.

“ Hah ! ” said he, as his eyes went about the room, alarmed. “ Yes, yes, you are right. Perhaps I had best not go too far. I did not know,” in a still lower tone, “ that our friends voted for the removal to Lancaster.”

In a quiet corner, Ben found John Hancock and some friends soberly talking over the momentous happenings of the day. The elegant Hancock received the boy with the rather distant formality for which he was known ; and the dispatches were read at once.

“ Somewhat too late,” said he, coldly, after reading the hasty lines to his friends. “ This matter of there being no immediate danger will have to be acted upon at Lancaster.”

There was a slight laugh at this, for the remark was evidently intended as a witticism.

“ At a little distance inland,” spoke one of the party, also a member of the Congress, “ we can be assured of safety. For even our present commanders will scarcely allow the enemy to penetrate that far.”

“ Washington,” said Mr. Hancock, “ has not failed altogether. He has given us vic-



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tories. Remember, sir, with the means at his hand he cannot win all the time. It is too much to require of any general."

"But action is not too much to require of a general; it is not too much to ask the commander of an army that he have some enterprise; that he take the initiative occasionally, that he do not always wait until the enemy advances upon him before he makes a show of fighting."

"Right! Right!" came a number of voices. "Quite right!"

But another member, and apparently a supporter of Washington, here spoke out.

"I think," said he, "you have not properly considered what Mr. Hancock meant when he mentioned 'the means at his hand.'" The speaker tapped the table edge with the tip of one finger and proceeded: "When one considers the slender supply of soldiers which present themselves for service, one might wonder very properly where an army sufficiently powerful to cope with England is coming from. And even the small force which our general gathers only remains with him a short time. The term of enlistment is so



short that scarcely has a regiment reached a fair state of discipline than it disbands—and in this constant recruiting and training, the personnel of the army never reaches any but a most indifferent state. And, then, the money with which the force is to be maintained!” here the member looked about him and smiled. “What must keep Washington going for weeks would not cover the requirements of Howe for days. The supplies are seldom of sufficient quantity to fill the needs of our soldiers; the men go barefoot in the ranks; the able men lack the arms to fight with, and the sick men have not the medicine to make them well.”

At this there arose a chorus of approval and protest; the gathered members and their friends entered into the case with spirit and heat, and in the clamor that followed Ben heard little more. Having had nothing to eat since early morning, the lad, for the first time, began to feel a trifle faint; until this the excitement had sustained him, but the need of food was now strongly brought to his mind. So seating himself in a quiet nook near to a window at the front of the house



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he ordered a dish of eggs with bacon and well browned bread and other comforting things. The window was raised a few inches.

When these were placed before him, he fell to with relish and will, paying little attention to the high talk going on all about him.

Outside the inn door were several benches where patrons of the place were accustomed to sit in pleasant weather, and as Ben gazed idly out through the window at his elbow he found himself looking at the back of one of these, which was so placed ; and over the top of it he saw the crown of a hat.

"Some sensible person who quietly takes the air in spite of the cold weather," said Ben. "All this clatter and complaining is not worth listening to, he thinks, and so he will have none of it."

He had about reached this conclusion, when he saw a tall figure turn in from the street toward the inn door. At a glance the lad recognized Tobias Hawkins ; the next moment the man upon the bench had arisen to greet the newcomer, and he, in turn, Ben knew, even in the indifferent light and though his back was turned, as the man with the yellow smile.



## CHAPTER XI

### TELLS HOW BEN COOPER LISTENED TO SOME ASTONISHING REVELATIONS

FROM the manner of the men, it was evident that the coming of Tobias Hawkins was no surprise to his friend. Indeed, the latter had been, it was evident, patiently awaiting him ; and now the eagerness in his manner showed plainly that he attached some importance to the arrival.

“I had about given up all hope of you,” said the man with the yellow smile, his first words showing the truth of the lad’s discernment.

“I said I would reach here as soon after nine o’clock as I could. To be sure, it is somewhat after that ; but I could not finish my business earlier.”

“The hour at which it is finished,” said the other, “does not greatly matter. The question is, how did you succeed ? ”

Tobias Hawkins laughed and in the sound



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of that laugh Ben caught something like triumph.

"Success," said the man, "is so easily won, that there is no credit in it. But let us go inside where we can talk quietly."

"It would be much better if we remained where we are," said the other, looking about. "The inn is filled with madmen, I think. They can do nothing but rave over the defeat of Washington and the flight of Congress."

Hawkins, after a cautious glance about, seated himself upon the bench. A small cedar in a tub concealed the window at which Ben sat; the boy could see only the crowns of the two hats over the high back of the bench, but the delighted sound that came from Hawkins told him that the man was chuckling.

"Washington's defeat," repeated Hawkins; "ah, what a relief that was! It altered things all about me. Trenton and Princeton and the affairs in the Jerseys had set me a task that I sometimes despaired of, Sugden; but this one defeat brought all the complainings to the top again. The victories were forgotten; the commander had lost a battle, therefore the commander was incompetent."



"A rare good general, this Washington, I think," said Sugden. "A careful fighter and one that will last long—if they allow him?"

There was a laugh with this last, a mocking sort of laugh which indicated the speaker's disbelief in the possibility.

"With the goodness or the badness of Mr. Washington as an officer, we personally have nothing to do," said Hawkins. "We are paid to excite disbelief in him; our duty is to have him supplanted by a weaker man, so let us be about that, and bother with nothing else."

Ben felt his heart throb heavily at this, and the blood beat about his temples and roared in his ears. Here at last was the thing which he had thought for so long, put plainly into words. There was a movement on foot to displace Washington as head of the army; fearing that its forces would not be equal to the task of subduing the aroused colonies, the British government had set about undermining the one man whose genius they feared in the field.

"A conspiracy," breathed Ben. "A conspiracy conducted by this man Hawkins!"

Now better than ever did the lad under-



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stand the actions of Tobias Hawkins. As he thought over all the man's doings and sayings he fancied that they all centered in the one purpose.

"On New Year's Eve, when I first saw him, he was but newly come to Philadelphia to begin his plotting; and that faultfinding old fellow, Livingstone, was just the sort of man he needed to enable him to make a fair start; Hawkins knew that he was well connected, and much too stupid to ever suspect that he was being used."

The conspirators' eagerness that same night to learn from Mr. Morris the names of those persons who were not upon good terms officially with Washington once more returned to the boy.

"He has found out the greater part of them by now, I suppose," thought Ben. "There is the adventurer Conway, the vain General Gates, and the rather calculating Mifflin; he keeps the company of all three, and each of them is an enemy of Washington."

The man's threat that night returned to Ben.

"He feared that I had discovered his iden-



tity," he mused. "And he thought to stop my revealing what I knew. This man whom he calls Sugden as much as said so when I encountered him at Bristol. And the attempt to rob the carriage of the money sacks sent by Master Morris, for I now feel sure that Hawkins was the other party to that, was but another way of seeking the embarrassment of General Washington."

Hawkins was still chuckling over what were apparently pleasing thoughts. For a time the man with the yellow smile said nothing, but as the other seemed in no hurry to impart what he knew, he grew impatient.

"Come," he said, "let us know what you have to tell."

There was a pause, the chuckling ceased, and then Hawkins spoke.

"There was a time only last fall when I considered this work upon which we are now engaged as impossible. It was Admiral Howe who first mentioned it to me, I think, and I openly scouted it. Then Sir Henry Clinton broached it, and at last General Howe. Each of them fancied it, and each of them told me plainly that it was quite in my way."



Sugden grunted.

"They were right there; everything in the line of underground effort is in your way. I never saw any one who took more naturally to subterfuge, wriggling through keyholes, and the gaining of men's confidence for his own ends."

Tobias Hawkins laughed. This, so it seemed, he regarded as flattery.

"You are disposed to think rather well of any little talent that I may possess, my friend," he said. "But I paid no attention to either of the military or naval heroes," he proceeded; "their sort are seldom very keen in matters that do not have to do with the movements of fleets or divisions. However, when Lord George Germain wrote to me, begging me to undertake the task—and mentioning a handsome sum which the government would be disposed to pay me should I succeed—I began to seriously turn the matter over in my mind."

"Ah, yes, the money," said Sugden. "Germain knew how to interest you."

Again Tobias Hawkins laughed, in no way put out by the other man's candor.



"I can always be appealed to by way of my purse," he confessed. "I find that it's much the better way when all's said and done. To risk all for the honor of one's flag is well enough, perhaps, for some; but to mix a few gold pieces with the honor makes it ring better to others."

"Different minds have different fancies," admitted the man with the yellow smile. "But tell me, what ever made them hit upon the removal of Washington from command as the best means of weakening the movement for independence?"

"They knew the man, and they knew that such as he must sooner or later clash with the petty people who were about him. Some of the newer members of Congress are small men; Washington is a giant; and mean natures always come to hate one superior to them. Could I gain the confidence of the small men in Congress, thought Lord George Germain, I would have taken a long step toward success."

"Excellent!" said Sugden, approvingly. "Most excellent!"

"Then," went on Tobias Hawkins, "upon my own part I knew that there would be a



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certain amount of dissatisfaction in the army. Every captain would want to be a colonel, and every colonel a general of brigade. These dissatisfied ones I decided to select as my friends."

The nature of the man's plan appalled the young American; and yet he could not help but admire its cold-blooded perfection.

"And there are enough of that sort in the army for all intents," said Sugden. "It did not take me long to learn that all who put on a uniform did not do so through love of country. Gates, they say," and Sugden sniggered, "is the very man to bring victory to the American arms."

"There is a thing," said Hawkins, "which fits most excellently into my plan. Gates is a weak man, all but mad with vanity, and jealous in every fiber of his being of Washington. With much hard work I have centered upon him the favor of all in Congress who are opposed to the present commander."

"But they are not aware, I'll wager, that it was your hand that bent them so," said the other.

"They do not dream of it; each thinks the



idea began with himself, and I," with a laugh, "am careful enough to allow them to go on thinking so."

"Now as to this foreign adventurer, Conway," said Sugden; "he seems to have advanced in favor very rapidly."

"The opposition to Washington took him up because he dislikes Washington; they are struck with admiration of his military talents. I control him by the only means which could control him. He fancies, through my hints, that Gates is but a figurehead, and when the time comes to choose Washington's successor, that he, himself, will be the man."

"Better and better," commented the other, his tongue clicking in admiration. "You have lost none of your cunning, I see."

"You have heard of the change that has been made in the commissariat of the army, I suppose?"

"Why, yes, something, I think."

"It has been taken from the hands of those friendly to Washington. Delays will ensue, and that will insure a poorly fed, badly clothed and scantily cared-for following. With such a rabble, he can do nothing. The result



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will be the growth of the cry ' Give us Gates ; he can save the country ! ' ”

“ Clever,” admired the other ; “ very clever, upon my word ! ”

“ It is lucky for us that Gates has succeeded Schuyler in the north,” said Hawkins. “ Schuyler has borne the brunt of the fighting up there, and when he had so placed the pieces as to assure success, he was removed from command, and the favorite sent in his place to reap the fruits of his labor.”

“ It is well planned,” said Sugden. “ I cannot see what is to prevent the entire movement for liberty, as they call it, from falling like a house of cards.”

Ben Cooper had listened to this conversation with blood that was slowly heating to a point where an outbreak of some sort must come. He did not stop to reason as to what was best to do, as Nat Brewster or some others of his friends would have done ; but when the impulse came, he threw up the sash, placed his hands upon the window sill and vaulted through. Stalking round the end of the bench he suddenly confronted the two conspirators.



"Perhaps, Master Tobias Hawkins," said he, "the fall of the cause against which you have worked so very expertly will not come as easily as you think. General Washington is not without friends; and look to yourself that it is not you, instead of he, that will come to grief."

For a moment the two men were too astounded to speak. The position of the bench upon which they sat, so they had apparently thought, and the low tones which they had used, made it impossible that they be overheard. The window behind them had escaped their attention entirely. But Hawkins recovered himself readily enough and regarded the indignant lad, a sneer upon his face.

"Ah, we meet again," said he, in a low, savage tone. "It would seem that in the end we must become more or less intimate."

"Perhaps much more than you will care for," said Ben Cooper. "Your intentions and your accomplishments will make you none too popular with Congress, the army or the public."

"And so," said Tobias Hawkins, slowly,



"you would make known what you have heard."

"At the first opportunity," said Ben, hotly.

"Perhaps," said Hawkins, and a disagreeable smile crept across his face, "it would be best for you to raise a hue and cry now. There are many persons of importance in the inn; call them, charge me with what you like!" His head bent toward the boy and one finger waved at him mockingly. "But who, think you, would believe what you have said?"

Ben stared at the man, the truth of what he said coming like a shock.

"I am a gentleman of consequence in the community," smiled Tobias Hawkins, disagreeably, "and you are a wild youngster whose word is not to be too largely credited. I have friends in the Congress, in the army, in civil life. Everything that I have done," and the smile grew still more disagreeable, "has been done openly and for the good of the country."

"But your reasons," flared the boy, "your reasons have been to ——"

"Can you prove that?" questioned Hawkins.



"You yourself have said it," returned Ben. The man laughed, and his companion joined him.

"I deny that I said it," spoke Hawkins. "And now what do you say?"

Nonplused, Ben stood for a moment, not knowing what answer to make. Hawkins was right. Ben could prove no wrong intention behind anything the man had done. To have plotted against Washington was no crime. Many men in public life were doing the same thing openly, every day. Now that it was too late, Ben saw that he had been too impulsive in making known his presence; but though defeated, he made up his mind to have a final fling at any rate.

"You are right," said he, evenly enough, now that he realized the weakness of his position. "Just now I can do nothing—in that way."

"Ah, you see that, do you?" laughed the man.

"I do," replied Ben. "But there is one thing which you, seemingly, do not see."

"And what is that?" asked Tobias Hawkins.



"The nature of the punishment awaiting known enemies found within the lines," said the boy, composedly.

There was a moment's silence; then Hawkins, with a shifting in his bold eyes which was not there a little before, said :

"I don't quite understand."

"It is difficult," said Ben, "to recall a face seen in the press of battle, more especially when that battle took place so long ago, as did, we will say, Bunker Hill. But, sometimes, it can be done; and frequently more than one person can recall the face. So, in your proceedings, Master Hawkins, do not be overbold, I warn you. When one knows a thing, as I know it, there are many ways of bringing about a desired end."

And with that the boy turned about and entered the inn, leaving the two men staring after him.



## CHAPTER XII

### HOW STORM-STAYED GUESTS CAME TO THE INN AT RISING SUN

AFTER leaving the two conspirators on the bench before Clark's Inn, Ben Cooper entered the building, sought the landlord and paid his score.

"Then you do not mean to stop here to-night," said the host, who knew him.

"No," answered Ben. "It will, perhaps, be the last time I shall have to pass with my father in many days, and I think I shall ride out to Germantown and spend the night there."

His horse, which had been placed in the inn stable, was brought out; Ben mounted and struck out north, meaning finally to turn into the Germantown road. He entered this some distance beyond the city limits; the night was moonlit, but there was a haze hanging over everything which waved from tree and bush, in the light breeze, like long, gauzy



streamers of white. He had gone quite some distance on his way when at length he made out a peculiar sound, a steady rising and falling, of which he for a long time could make nothing. Finally, however, he understood, and laughed.

"It's some one singing," he said.

The sound was behind him, and coming through the waving banners of mist, edge-lit in the moonlight, it produced a weird effect. He drew in his horse, after a time, in order to hear the better; away in his mind was the impression that he had heard the music somewhere before.

Nearer and nearer drew the singer, the fall of hoofs now mingled with the song; listening, Ben at last recalled the mournful melody.

"It is one of the songs sung by Paddy Burk on the night I met him by the Bristol road."

Then amid the clatter of oncoming hoofs the words of the song became plain.

"Oh, ye Irish lads of fair renown,  
Come listen unto me;  
And I'll relate a bitter fate  
That happened on the sea;  
It was in the dark December  
Upon the Baltic coast ——"



Here the singer's horse stumbled, and the song came to an abrupt termination. Then a voice was lifted in protest.

"Arrah, what kind of a beast are you, at all, at all! Faith, you go stumbling along like a porpoise in wooden shoes. Lift up your feet, you good-for-nothing villain, or it's the whip I'll be taking to you, though I've never done it before."

Amazed, Ben called out :

"What, Paddy Burk!"

The horse and rider came to an abrupt stand.

"Who is that taking me name into his mouth?" demanded the rider, his hand upon his pistol. "I see you there, but I can't make you out."

"It's Ben Cooper," answered the lad.

Instantly the other touched his mount, and it trotted forward.

"Arrah, now, here's a meeting, indeed," cried Paddy, with a rollicking laugh. "I knew you were somewhere ahead of me, but sorra the sight did I hope to have of you to-night."

"But how did you come here?" asked Ben, puzzled. "You are about the last person in



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the world I expected to see on the German-town road to-night."

"Why, then," spoke Paddy, humorously, "it's meself that did not expect to be here, either. But you see," as their nags cantered ahead side by side, "I were sent on to Philadelphia, too, with dispatches; I asked for you at the inn across from the State House and was told that you had started for your home.

" 'Well,' says I to myself, 'you've only been there once, Paddy, my lad, but sure, I think you can find the way even at night, for never was there a place where you were made more welcome.' "

"It's a lonely way, and I'm glad indeed to have your company," said Ben, for he and the Irish boy had become the best of friends during the months of their acquaintance. There was no more merry soul in all the American force than Paddy; also, he was a daring rider and tireless. In the many fights in the Jerseys he had shown himself fearless and resourceful. During the day at Brandywine he had been with Sterling's brigade, in the thick of the early onset, as Ben learned as they rode along.

"It was a great day, entirely," declared



Paddy, "and sorry was I that we couldn't win it. But," hopefully, "there are other days coming, and our day is among them, somewhere, I'm sure."

After a little they fell into silence, and the Irish boy began to take note of the road.

"Why," said he, "it is a lonely place, sure enough. A while ago, as I were coming along, I felt a bit down in the mouth, and that is why I took to the singing."

"If it hadn't been for that, I'd not have recognized you," said Ben.

"Sure, then, that is lucky enough. But," and Paddy looked back over his shoulder, "it's not all good fortune me singing brought me to-night. Faith, a while ago it nearly got me a knock on the head."

"How was that?" asked Ben.

"As I just said, I felt a bit down in the mouth, and so started a few bars of 'Tatter Jack Walsh' by way of a lilt. Never a bit of attention I was paying to anything, but looked straight between my horse's ears as they stuck up before me, when lo! and behold you, I hears a voice almost at my ear, and suddenly sees a horseman riding on each side of me."



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"What then?" said Ben, with interest.

"My hand makes a move for the pistol in my holster, but before I could reach it one of the men says:

"'Keep hands off that. No harm's meant you.' Then turning to the other he says: 'I told you that a screech-owl like this would not be he.'

"Then says the other:

"'No harm's done in making sure. This is the road he'd take, and he's somewhere ahead.'

"'Hush!' says the other, and he made as though to clap his hand over the mouth of the one that spoke. 'Hush. Not another word!'"

"Ah," said Ben Cooper, and his eyes also went back over his shoulder. "And what did you do then?"

"I put spurs to my horse," replied Paddy, "and made away from their companionship as hard as I could. And I promised myself as I came along that I'd warn the person they were after if I came up with him."

"Then, Paddy, you've kept your promise, for unless I am greatly mistaken, I am that person."



Paddy uttered a surprised exclamation.

"Now then, look at that," said he. "Faith, it's a thick head I have entirely not to think of it myself. And so," with great concern in his voice, "it's you they are riding to overtake?"

"I suppose," said Ben, evading this question, "that you did not gain a very good view of them?"

"I did not," admitted the Irish lad, "for it were a part of the road which were overhung by great trees, and sorra a ray of moonlight fell upon them. But both of them were of good size, I could see that, and they sat their horses like men used to the work."

In a very little while the two lads reached a section not far from Germantown known as Rising Sun; and it was here that Ben's horse, having been hard pressed all the day, suddenly showed symptoms of lameness. At a little public house, which showed a glint of light in one of the windows, they dismounted, and Paddy thundered at the door. After a few moments it opened and a man came out, holding a light above his head. He was a



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small man with a lean, crafty face and sharp eyes.

"What's wanted?" he asked in an angry tone. "What's this knocking, sirs, at this time of night?"

"My horse has gone lame," said Ben. "I want to leave him here to be cared for, and engage another to finish my journey to Germantown."

"You may leave your horse if you care to," said the man. "But as for giving you one to replace it, that is more than we can do. We have but one, and that's in the city to-night, gone with a load of vegetables."

"What shall we do?" said Ben to his companion. "I can't torture my good beast by forcing him further."

"There seems to be sorra the thing to do but stop here," said Paddy Burk, "and make the best of it."

Ben also felt that nothing else remained to do; but somehow he had a feeling that it would not be well. The idea of the two riders somewhere along the road came to him unpleasantly.

"But," he thought, trying to shake the



feeling off, "there is more to be feared afoot in the open road than there is in an honest public house."

He must have spoken the last few words aloud, for the sharp-faced man held up the lantern until the rays fell full upon the lad's face.

"Do you question the inn, sir?" he demanded, bristling. "It has had an honest name these many years. Drovers, farmers and all those going into and coming from the city have had bed and board here; and never was there one to say that a wrong was done him."

"I say nothing against your house, good man," said Ben. "For anything to the contrary I know, it may be the most perfect of inns."

He gave his horse to the man, who led it to the barn. Ben and Paddy followed, and after stripping the saddle from the animal examined the leg. Finding that the strain was nothing serious, they rubbed it well, bound it and saw that both beasts were fed. Then they went into the inn.

It was a shabby sort of place, dusty and ill



kept; but they were so situated that they could do nothing but make the best of it.

"What shall I get the gentlemen for their suppers?" inquired a huge, red-faced woman as she came rolling from an inner room. "We have some excellent ham, and some fowls well worth the price we ask for them. Try a pair, roasted, sirs; they are that tender and young that they'll melt in your mouths."

But both boys had eaten their evening meal, and said so.

"If you can give us beds, that's all we'll trouble you for," said Ben.

There was some grumbling at this between the man and woman; but finally the former lighted a candle and nodded for the lads to follow him.

"But take care of the stairs," he said, as they ascended a crazy flight of them; "they are somewhat old and worn, and we would not have an accident happen for the world."

"Why, then," spoke Paddy Burk, as he felt, with no little trepidation, the stairs tremble under his feet, "if you are as nervous about it as all that, it's queer that you don't repair them."



The man grinned at him over his lean shoulder.

"They don't belong to me," he said. "We are tenants of this place, and the owner should make the repairs."

They reached the second floor through a trap-door and found themselves in a low ceilinged room with cobwebs hanging from the rafters and the window-panes smutted and broken. Two beds of straw were upon the floor in opposite corners, and the boys looked at them askance. However, they were accustomed to much worse in the camp, and so said nothing.

"I'll leave the candle with you," said the man as he stood upon the shaky stairs, his head and shoulders protruding through the trap. "We rise early in the morning," he continued, "and I suppose you'll want to make an early start."

"Yes," said Ben, "and if you do not hear us moving about, landlord, arouse us."

The man said that he would, lowered the trap-door and disappeared.

"If my horse is not able to travel in the morning," said Ben to Paddy, as they pre-



pared for bed in the dim candle-light, "I'll have to go on to my father's and get another."

"That will require us to be stirring early then, if we expect to get back to camp at any reasonable hour."

Ben shook his head.

"I'm afraid the ride back will be much shorter than you think."

"What! Do you suppose ——"

"That the army is going to fall back? Yes. And," with a sigh, "it may continue to fall back."

As Ben stretched himself upon the pallet, his mind was busy with the consequences that would attend these constant retreats. The hands of Washington's enemies would be strengthened; should Gates meet with a success in the north, he would stand before the unthinking as the shining military light of the nation, and Congress might go to the length of placing him at the head of the army. The boy's knowledge of military tactics was necessarily limited, but he was aware of the almost certain fatality that would attach to this action. The powerful intellect and unshaken fortitude of Washington replaced by



the petty vanity of Gates meant but one thing.

"Destruction," muttered Ben. "Such a man as General Gates could not sustain a series of disasters. He would collapse under discouragement, and the army would melt away."

Here Paddy blew out the candle, and crawled into bed. As he lay there, a single spot of light upon the ceiling attracted his attention.

"What's that?" said he, and arose upon one elbow. Ben did likewise, and both stared at the spot of light. Then they noticed a thin beam coming up through the floor.

"It's a hole," said Paddy Burk. "They still have a light below stairs, and it's shining through."

As they settled back to sleep, the first heavy drops of a rainfall set in. The pattering upon the shingles lulled them into that drowsy state which comes before deep slumber. Through the dim avenues of this, Ben had a consciousness that the rain had greatly increased and the wind had lifted, and after a little he became aware that some one was stir-



ring without in the road. But in his dreamy condition the sounds seemed far away. Voices were heard, but as though they were the voices of persons in the distance. But the loud closing of a door aroused him to a more wakeful condition; heavy footfalls were heard below, and a voice spoke sharply to the landlord.

"I tell you, gentlemen," said the latter, "I have no more room. The house is a small one, and ——"

"Well, you'll have to accommodate us somehow, Master Host," said a voice which brought Ben to a sitting position. "There is no other place but the 'Waggon' at German-town, and that's too far in this weather. And to return to the city is out of the question."

"We have but the one room for guests, sir," stated the landlord. "That has but two beds and they both are occupied."

"I told you that it would be better to continue," said another voice, and at the sound of this Ben arose. "We still had a fair chance to come up with him, and ——"

"That will do," said the first voice. "A



still tongue would be best suited to the occasion."

Stepping softly across the floor Ben reached the place where the beam of light shot upward; through the crevice in the planks he had a good view of the public room below.

There in the center of the floor stood Tobias Hawkins, a riding whip in his hand; and against the chimneypiece leaned the long, bony form of the man with the yellow smile.

It was the work of an instant to awaken Paddy Burk. The Irish boy was one of those who come out of a sleep keen and alert; and he listened quietly as Ben whispered to him the necessary particulars as to the men below.

"Arrah, then," said Paddy, with a yawn, "they are the two bla'guards, entirely." He crept with Ben to the hole in the floor and surveyed the two below with great interest. "And so they are the villains who stopped the carriage with the money in it," he whispered. "And to think," astonished, "that it'd be the same two whom I met to-night. Sure the world is a small place, after all."

"Put our horses up, anyhow," said Tobias Hawkins to the landlord. "And after you've



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seen them well and fed and littered, awaken these travelers and inquire of them if they'd not share their room with two gentlemen seeking shelter for the night."

"Why, as for the matter of that," said the landlord, as though the idea appealed to him, "perhaps we might do something in that way, sirs. You see, the two travelers are but boys, and they may be prevailed upon to ——"

But the two men stopped him with uplifted hands and forward steps.

"Boys?" said Sugden.

"What sort of boys?" asked Hawkins.

"Why, well-grown lads, perhaps of eighteen," replied the sharp-faced landlord. "They were on their way north on the road when one of their horses went lame—not that of the Irish one, but the other."

"The Irish one," said Tobias Hawkins. "Ah!"

The two watchers above saw him exchange glances with his companion, and they were glances full of meaning.

"We met the Irish lad on the road," said Sugden, "but, as it chanced, he was alone."

"From their words in the barn, though



they spoke little, I drew that the Irish one had overtaken the other on the road."

"As like as not," said Tobias Hawkins. Then he asked: "Did you perchance ask their names?"

"I did not, but it may be that my wife did." He went to a door in the rear and opening it called lowly: "Did you inquire of the two up-stairs what their names were?"

The voice of the woman replied:

"No. But one of them I've seen before. He's the son of Lawyer Cooper who lives at Germantown."

"Ah, yes," said Tobias Hawkins, as the landlord closed the door.

"Do you know him, sir?" asked the landlord, curiously.

"Very slightly," said Hawkins, and the watchers saw the evil smile which he gave his friend. "Very slightly; but I am much interested in him, nevertheless."

"Shall I go up and see if they will share the room with you?"

"Not yet. Put our horses away." Hawkins surveyed the man closely; apparently he saw something in the lean face and sharp eyes



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which pleased him, for he laughed, and continued : “ When you return we shall discuss their being disturbed or no.”

And when the man left the room, the two sat down by the table upon which burned the candle ; the eyes of both were turned in the direction of the room above, and both shook with silent laughter that was not pleasant to see.



## CHAPTER XIII

SHOWS THE BARGAIN THAT WAS STRUCK BY  
TOBIAS HAWKINS AND HIS FRIEND

As Ben Cooper and Paddy Burk looked down through the crevice in the floor, the two men drew together across the table and began to speak in tones so low that the boys were unable to hear their words.

"Faith, they look like grinning imps, so they do," commented the Irish lad in a whisper. "Sorra another pair like them did I ever see."

For some little time did the two continue to speak; then the landlord's entrance interrupted them.

"Now, gentlemen, I am at your bidding in any way that I can serve you," said he.

Tobias Hawkins regarded him fixedly for a short time, then he spoke.

"You have not a very large place here."

"We would have a larger if we could," said the man, surlily.

"But sometimes small places are very well



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patronized," and Hawkins looked about the dingy public room, plainly disbelieving that such was the case here.

"The small places you have in mind," spoke the lean-faced landlord, "are very much unlike this one, then. We have not enough patronage to hire a hostler, even though we are on a highroad to the city."

"And the villain told us that he were patronized by all," whispered Paddy Burk, indignantly. "Faith, I thought it strange that he could get so many into one cobwebby room."

Ben pressed his arm for silence, for Hawkins was speaking.

"You will pardon the liberty I take," said the man, "but I would not say that you were very well off."

"If you did say so," spoke the landlord, "you would be saying what had never a grain of truth in it."

Hawkins laughed; never for a moment did his hard eyes leave the face of the other.

"It is seldom, I suppose," he went on, "that any one comes along who gives you the opportunity to lay something by."



"They never come," declared the man, sourly. "For the most part, our patrons are like those two," and his finger pointed upward. "Nothing but a lodging; not a crumb did they eat between them."

Hawkins clicked his tongue as though greatly in sympathy with the host.

"You can make no great progress at that rate," said he.

"A man might stay a beggar all his life if he depended upon such trade," spoke Sugden.

Surprised at so much sympathy, the man began to make a detailed statement of his complaint, and was still more surprised that he was listened to. When he had done, Hawkins spoke again.

"So it goes," said he. "Seldom, indeed, do we get justice done us. Now you," cocking a knowing eye at the landlord, "are a fellow who might make a trifle in other ways beside innkeeping. The wonder is that you have not tried."

"Stuck here in this place, what can I do? And nothing ever comes this way that has any money attached to it."



Hawkins shook his head.

"Perhaps you are wrong there," said he. "I dare venture that many a time there's been a goodly sum, only awaiting the earning of it, right here in this very room."

"Them as had it kept it mighty close, then," said the landlord.

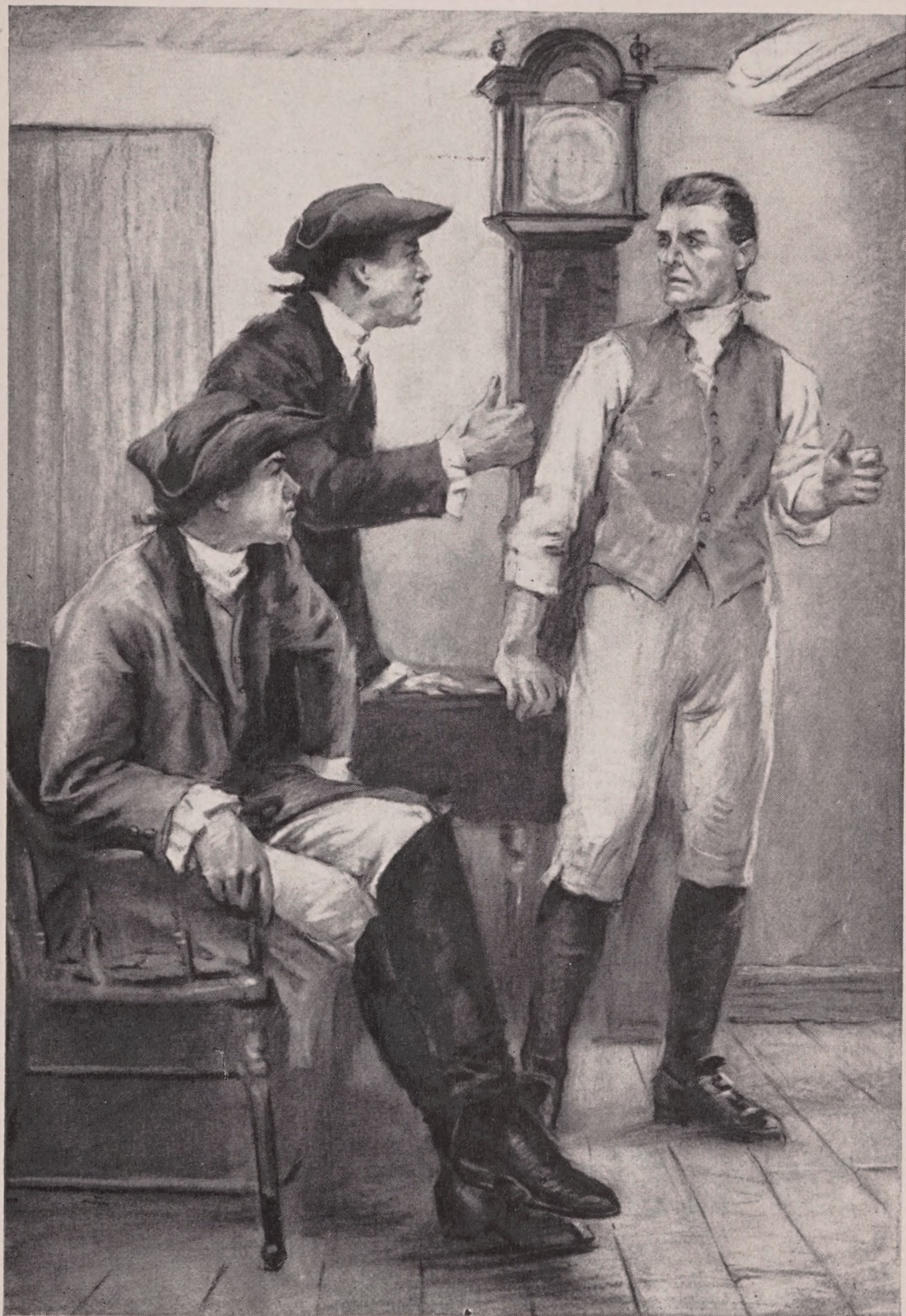
"It may not have been that. Who knows but that it was you who closed your eyes to the chance? Why, for all you can see, there may be as much as you'd earn in a six-month, here to-night, at your hand."

For a moment there was silence; the lean claw of the landlord stroked his chin and his small, sharp eyes looked into those of Tobias Hawkins.

"Maybe I don't take your meaning, sir," said he, "and then, maybe I do. But I will say this for myself: If there is such a sum here to-night that I can be in the way of earning, why, I'm the man for it."

"Excellent," approved Hawkins. "I fancied to hear some such answer from you." He got upon his feet and advanced, switching his boot-leg with his riding whip, to the chimney-piece where the landlord stood. "You look





*THE MAN SHRANK A LITTLE*







to be a fellow of good courage—one not easily frightened.”

The man's hand now left his chin, and his glance was swift.

“Now,” said he, “I think I begin to understand you. This money, sir, is how much?”

“Thirty English sovereigns.”

The landlord's eyes glistened in the candle-light.

“It's a good sum, in the common way of speaking,” he said. “But, perhaps,” shrewdly, “none too good for the work to be done.”

Hawkins bent forward and whispered in his ear; then his finger pointed upward, as though indicating something in the room above. The man shrank a little, and his face seemed to blanch. But his gaze remained fixed steadily upon Hawkins.

“Ah!” said he, with a deep drawn breath, “so it is that!”

“To a man of easy manner and confidence in himself,” said Hawkins, “the thing is no great matter. The like is done often enough, I dare be sworn. So what harm if an odd case or two be added?”

“To such as that,” said the landlord, and



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the lean hand was again caressing the pointed chin, "there is risk attached."

"Risk!" Both Hawkins and Sugden jeered at the bare notion of such a thing. "Surely," continued the former, "you do not fear two ——"

But the landlord stopped him.

"Not that, mayhap," said he, "though the two are more than ordinarily well armed."

"Ah, well," sneered Hawkins, "I see you are not the man for the money, after all."

"Wait!" The landlord held up a hand. "Just one moment, sirs. What," and his lean face was thrust forward, "would you have me do with the two lads?"

"Deliver them up to us—nothing more."

"Ah!" The landlord showed vast relief. "That is a matter of some difference. However, my wife is here; if you'll but give me a moment I'll speak to her."

He crossed to the inner door and called his wife by name.

"There is some trifling matter of business toward," said he. "The gentlemen have money to pay, if we will but set ourselves to earn it."



The huge woman rolled from the inner room with ponderous slowness.

"Money, did you say?" she inquired, with a sharp greed in her tone. "How much, and what's to do?"

There was a moment's silence; then the landlord spoke slowly.

"The sum is thirty sovereigns—golden sovereigns," his lips smacking the last words as though the taste of the yellow metal was upon his tongue.

"To be sure, golden ones, if they are sovereigns at all, idiot. Who ever heard of sovereigns of any lesser metal?"

Hawkins laughed at this.

"They will be easily earned," said he. "And we will pay, money down, the instant the thing is over with."

"What's to do?" asked the woman once more.

"The gentlemen are friends to the two lads up-stairs," said the landlord. "And they desire that they shall be given into their charge."

"If we are to earn the gold so easily as that," said the woman, eagerly, "there they sleep above. Take them and welcome."



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"Perhaps it will not be quite so easy as you think," said Sugden. "They, more than likely, will object to accompanying us."

"What!" cried the woman, with a laugh, "would they so stand in the way of our earning a trifle of money? That would be uncivil of them."

"Nevertheless," said Hawkins, "they would object."

The great red face of the woman became overspread with a grin.

"It may be," she said, "that they will not care to make their objections very strong. We have a way with us—if you do not forbid it—of persuading those who do not fall in with our desires."

"Rest assured," said Hawkins, "that we forbid nothing."

"Ah!" The huge body of the woman seemed to quiver like a jelly as she chuckled. "I understand you completely, now." She turned to her husband. "We are forbidden nothing," she said. "Perhaps we can come upon them much as we ——"

"Be still," said the landlord, in a low, warning tone.



But the woman only chuckled the more.

"Do you think you can make the gentlemen believe we have never undertaken any such little matters as this before?" she said. Then turning to Hawkins, she said, "But now that I understand you, sir, I see that thirty sovereigns would be too little for what you expect. Be a generous gentleman and make it fifty. Times are hard, and a thing of this sort is both dangerous and difficult."

"Do what I ask, and fifty sovereigns are yours," said Hawkins.

"Spoken like the open-handed gentleman I took you for," cried the landlord's wife, delightedly. "And now," to her husband, "let us set to to earn this prize. Do you go first, and I'll follow after with the light."

"No light," said the man sulkily, as though he did not relish being ordered about. "A light would waken them."

He took a number of straps down from a peg behind a door where they hung among some odds and ends of harness. From another place he took a short, heavy, mace-like weapon, at sight of which the woman resumed her chuckling and shaking.



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"Ah, that is the gentle persuader," she said. "Many's the time I've silenced an over-noisy patron with it. Its reasoning is short and sharp, my good sirs, and no one who makes its acquaintance remains unconvinced."

"Enough of your clacking," said the landlord, sharply. "Let us set about our work."

The two lads expected to see them ascend the rickety staircase; but in this they were wrong; for after a few brief sentences to the two guests, the landlord and his wife disappeared through the doorway leading to the inner room.

"Well," whispered Ben to his companion, "what do you think of this?"

"Sure, and it's past thinking about it I am," said Paddy Burk. "Never in the whole of me life did I see or hear such a lot of complete blackguards."

"They will be here in a moment or two," said Ben. "How shall we receive them?"

Paddy chuckled.

"Arrah," said he, "it'll be no great task to upset the landlord and his fat wife, even though they have a bludgeon with them."



"Don't forget," answered Ben, "that there remain the two down-stairs. If the landlord fails they will not long be idle."

"Right," agreed Paddy. "But, sure, we have no call to be afeered of them, either. Let them come, and it's a warm reception we will try and give them."

Then they waited in silence for further developments. Ben listened intently for the approach of the pair who were stealing upon them from somewhere in the darkness. The lad had noticed no doors in the room, save the one in the floor, and was puzzled to know just how they were to be approached.

However, both he and Paddy Burk drew on their clothing while they waited; and when this was done, an idea struck Ben.

"We'd better have a light ready, so that we may get a sight of them when they arrive," said he.

"But that would throw us wide open to a shot from hiding," protested Paddy.

"We'll arrange that," spoke Ben.

With his tinder and flint carefully muffled he soon had a light; then with a burning candle screened behind a coat in such a way



that the only illumination was thrown upon the far wall, they renewed their waiting.

It was some time before they caught any sound ; and when it came it was apparently from without. The rain was still falling briskly ; occasionally the thunder pealed and the sheets of pale lightning flared across the broken panes. Paddy Burk, whose ear also detected the movement outside, whispered :

“Faith, it’s a ducking they are willing to take, to come at us.”

“I don’t understand it,” said Ben in the same low tone. “Here we are on the second floor, and yet the sounds are seemingly just outside the rear windows. I’m going to find out about it.”

He crept softly across the room to the point where he knew the rear windows to be. Then he carefully lifted his head and peered out. In a few moments the lightning flared again, giving him a glimpse of a rain-drenched roof which was almost even with the sill ; and stealing across this toward the windows at one of which he stood, was the sharp-faced landlord ; through an open door in the roof the huge, red-faced woman struggled clumsily.



At sight of these Ben retreated to where Paddy crouched in the shadow.

“They are coming,” he whispered.

In a very few moments they heard a creaking at one of the windows, and then a long pause. It were as though the person without had caught sight of the dimmed light of the screened candle and was carefully examining it. Apparently satisfied, however, the creaking at the window resumed; a gust of damp air showed that a sash had been thrust open. Then a sound of another sort told them that some one had slid into the room.

Softly, slowly and carefully, footsteps advanced in the darkness; and when, in Ben's judgment, the intruder had reached the center of the floor, his waiting hand drew aside the coat and the candle-light streamed about.

There stood the landlord, arrested in his next step by the disconcerting illumination; in his hand he held the bludgeon with which he had purposed to stun the expectedly sleeping boys; and framed in the open window was the huge, red face of his wife.

Seeing that he was detected, the landlord leaped forward with a snarl; but with a single



blow of his pistol butt, Ben Cooper struck him down. At sight of her husband's fall, the woman burst into a dreadful screech of rage; and in the midst of this the boys heard the sudden rush of feet below them; and the creaking and groaning of the infirm staircase told them that Tobias Hawkins and the man with the yellow smile were leaping upward.



## CHAPTER XIV

### HOW BEN AND PADDY BURK MADE AWAY FROM THE HOUSE OF DANGER

WHEN Ben Cooper heard the two men come plunging up the crazy old stairs, his active brain at once began to cast about for a means of defense. The landlord was struggling to his feet, the blow, perhaps, having been a glancing one.

“Open the trap,” cried Ben.

Though he did not understand why, Paddy instantly did as he was bidden. And as he was doing so Ben grasped the landlord. The man struck out wildly, but the lad was behind him and held him fast.

“Down with him,” said Ben, swiftly.

And Paddy, now grasping the idea, also seized the man ; with a heave they raised him from his feet. The woman shrieked and strove to climb in at the window ; then the landlord shot through the trap-door full upon the oncoming men on the stairs. And this



latter structure, infirm as it was, could not bear the sudden shock of the impact ; with a splintering crash the supports gave way ; stairway and men went down amid a cloud of dust, and a chorus of startled shouts.

Paddy Burk, as he clapped to the trap-door, laughed gleefully.

"Why, then," said he, "he never made such a hasty going down-stairs of it in his life before. And the other two were fair surprised at his haste, by the looks of their faces when he met them."

"You villains," wheezed the woman, who, seeing that success was impossible, had ceased her efforts to enter by the window. "You have killed him."

"Arrah, that would be the unlucky thing, entirely," commented Paddy. "Sure, the like of him were intended for the gallows, and it's a shame, so it is, that it should be cheated of him."

While the woman was panting forth some sort of an answer to this, a gust of wind extinguished the candle, and under cover of the darkness they heard her withdraw across the roof, and go groaning through the scuttle.



Now that their own light was out, that which came through the crevice in the floor was plain once more ; and acting upon the same impulse, both boys looked down into the room below.

From the heap of débris formed by the collapsed stairway, the three men were just arising, and their voices were raised in bitter exclamations against those who had been the cause of their mishaps.

"They were awake," declared the landlord as he rubbed his hurts and limped about. "They overheard what we were saying and were waiting for me."

"You're a numskull!" stormed Tobias Hawkins. "Why did you not say that there was some chance of their hearing us?"

"How was I to know that they were not asleep?" groaned the man. "Oh, my head, my head!"

"It's a thousand pities that he didn't break your head," growled Sugden, trying to remove the traces of the fall from his clothes. "But come," his eyes glowing evilly, "show us the way you reached them ; this time they'll not come off first best, I promise you."



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The boys, as they watched, saw the man take out a heavy pistol.

"This way to the ladder that leads to the loft," said the landlord, pointing to the inner door; "then to the roof itself, and ——"

"Enough of that!" here broke in Tobias Hawkins. The watchers saw him gesture upward with one hand, as though warning them that if the lads had heard what they had planned previously, they would be likely to do so again. Then the man began speaking in a low tone which neither Ben nor Paddy could catch distinctly. While he talked the landlord secured a short-barreled musket from a closet, and Sugden examined his pistol with attention. A great deal of Hawkins' low-voiced talk seemed to be the asking of questions; the landlord answered with much gesturing and pointing. And while this was in progress the huge landlady come rolling in, and with great spirit and panting eagerness entered into whatever plans were being made.

"As I look at her," said Paddy Burk, "faith, I see not a one of them who's more anxious to do us harm than she is."

"They all seem determined enough to me,"



said Ben, dryly. "And I think it's time for us to take some steps to meet them. It will be no great while now before we have that short musket and those pistols looking in our faces."

Once more the candle was lighted and the two boys looked about the room carefully. There were six windows in all; two of these overlooked the roof in the rear from which the landlord had entered; two were at the front with the porch roof directly underneath.

"They can come upon us as easily from the front as the rear," said Ben. "These two windows on the side," going to them, candle in hand, "overlook the yard which we crossed in going to the barn."

Paddy Burk peered out at one of these.

"It's not much of a drop to the ground," said he, recklessly.

"There is a stone pavement which might serve to cripple us," said Ben. "Now these," and he bent forward, "might help us to avoid an injury."

So saying he picked up a number of long straps from the floor. They were the same



that the landlord had brought, apparently with a view to trussing them up ; and when he had fallen under the pistol butt he had dropped them.

"The luck," quoth Paddy, "is with us to-night. Sure, here we are with the way of escape placed at our hands by the very black-guard that would be the first to send a shot after us."

Carefully knotting the straps together, they fastened one end to a rafter, the other they dropped out at a window ; then they collected their belongings and prepared to depart. After they had extinguished the candle, they stood for a moment, listening ; there were careful footsteps below and the sound of a door opening and closing.

"They are making ready," said Ben, in a whisper.

With his pistol in one hand Paddy crept out at the window and slid down the leather rope. A moment later and Ben had followed him, and again they stood listening. From the front came a faint scrambling noise, and Ben grasped his friend's arm.

"There's some one climbing the porch," he



whispered. "Some one will also make for the rear windows ——"

"And would draw our attention—if we were here," interrupted the astute Paddy. "And while we were watching, or fighting with them, those from the front would jump in on us."

In the barn they quickly found their horses, and led them out. To prevent possible pursuit and a shot in the dark, Ben also brought out the horses ridden by Hawkins and Sugden. One of these he saddled for himself, intending to lead his own lamed animal; then they mounted.

As they did so, there came a sudden crash from the upper story of the inn. Looking up they could make out nothing, for the night was thick.

"They have burst in the windows at the back," said Ben.

And at that instant, as though to prove that he had judged correctly a few moments before, there came a second crash. There was a jingle of glass upon the tavern porch, a shout and the sound of stamping feet. Then a light flared up in the windows through one of which they had just passed.



"Suppose," said Paddy, always ready for an adventure or a lark, "that we give them some small idea as to where we are."

Then, actuated by a common impulse, they drew their pistols and sent a crashing volley through the lighted squares of glass above. As the windows splintered before the discharge, a chorus of startled cries arose, and then with shouts of laughter at their parting jest, the two boys clapped spurs to their horses and went galloping away through the rain.



## CHAPTER XV

TELLS OF MUCH FIGHTING AND ALSO HOW  
JOHNSON QUINSEY MADE HIS APPEARANCE

GENERAL LORD HOWE had demonstrated on many occasions since he had taken command of the king's army that he was a man of small enterprise ; more than once had his failure to follow up an advantage permitted Washington's force to recuperate after receiving a staggering blow. After Brandywine the same thing occurred. Howe, instead of pursuing the flying Americans as a commander of proper spirit would have done, camped upon the field of battle, remaining there two days.

Washington retreated through Darby, and crossed the Schuylkill to Germantown, where his army had a brief rest. Then, with the idea that Philadelphia must not fall even though Congress had deserted it, he made up his mind to advance once more and offer battle to the British.



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Ben Cooper and Paddy Burk had rejoined the army before it crossed the river ; and now, when it began to move once more, were among the light horse which had been sent on in advance. During the stop at Germantown, Ben had gathered his friends in their tent and told them in detail of the conversation which he had heard at Clark's Inn between Tobias Hawkins and his companion. They all listened with great attention and interest, and when he had finished Ezra Prentiss said :

"So this is the explanation of it. I knew there was envy of Washington among some of the other officers, and I heard that there was jealousy of him, in a certain faction of Congress. But the reason for these coming together and making a common cause against him, I had not known until now."

"They would risk ruining the country in order to further their own ends," ejaculated George Prentiss, indignantly. "With the same breath that they vote starvation to a faithful army, they declare themselves patriots."

"What a change a few years can make in men," bemoaned Ben. "The first Congress



was made up of giants who had nothing but freedom from tyranny in their minds, while this present one is composed, so it would seem, of some of the smallest spirits in the land."

Nat Brewster, always the most thoughtful of the four, had not said a great deal ; but that night he sought out General Greene and to him imparted Ben's story. The grave-faced Rhode Islander listened with every evidence of interest.

"Whom did you say overheard this talk?" he inquired when Nat had finished.

"Cooper."

"Ah! Then we can rely upon the report." There was a short silence ; then the general said : "I will bring the matter to the attention of the commander-in-chief. In the meantime, do you keep silent regarding it and warn your friends to do likewise."

However, though Ben expected to be summoned to headquarters, nothing developed that the boys could see. Notwithstanding this, he felt that below the surface of things a change must be taking place—that the commander and his trusted friends were fore-



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warned, and would now be better prepared to cope with the insidious danger creeping upon the states.

As he marched south once more, Washington left a body of Pennsylvania militia to guard the city; a number of other detachments held the various fords of the Schuylkill; orders were given to unmoor the floating bridge at the south road; every boat upon the west bank was taken to the east, and so an attack was guarded against from this direction. Down the Lancaster road pushed the Americans, horse, foot and artillery, the intention being to outflank the enemy. Howe's scouts, however, brought him news of this movement, and he at once proceeded to dispose his army so that he might in turn outflank the Americans. About a score of miles from Philadelphia at a place called Warren's Tavern, the two armies came face to face; but before more than a scattering fire could be exchanged, a deluge of rain descended, so wetting the ammunition of the patriots that the attack had to be abandoned.

Along the streaming roads and under a ceaseless downpour the army once more took



up its march of retreat. At Warwick Furnace, which stood near French Creek, a halt was made, and the chilled soldiers given a chance to dry themselves and their ammunition. From this place General Wayne set off with his division to endeavor to form a junction with some Maryland troops which were known to be somewhere in the rear of the British. Two nights later, while hanging upon the left of the enemy, Wayne was surprised by a powerful party under General Gray. Into the camp of the unsuspecting Americans plunged the British, firing no shot, but trusting to the bayonet for their work of death. In this fight three hundred of Mad Anthony's men were killed, and the remainder fled.

And it was only a short time after this that Howe marched toward Reading as though to seize the American stores gathered in that town. Upon the opposite side of the river Washington kept him in sight. Some two-score miles above Philadelphia, the British made an unexpected move in the night. A swift countermarch, a crossing of a ford, and next morning he was between Washington and the city, which he now proceeded to oc-



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cupy without resistance. There was a parade of troops through Philadelphia—the second within a few weeks—but how vast was the difference between the two. The first was that of an unkempt, semi-rabble, unshaven, ragged, badly armed, and with little training; the second was brilliant with gorgeously uniformed officers, shining with brass and gleaming with steel; the disciplined troops marched in steady, solid columns; powerful batteries trailed at the heels of great English horses; dragoons, mounted upon fiery chargers, pranced along in seemingly endless ranks. Little wonder if those true to the cause remaining in Philadelphia were shaken with doubt at this splendid display of British power; the Tories were exultant; the patriots looked on with brooding eyes, defiant still, but with despair in their hearts.

Everywhere the detractors of the commander-in-chief of the American army were busy; in the streets and public places of the city, and the towns round about; in the country roads when men met, and in inns where travelers foregathered, the bitter venom of petty spirits was heard, the brutal criticism



of minds uninformed upon the points at issue was loud and long.

"We provide him with an army, and he uses it to race the roads with," would be the cry of one.

"He has trained it to run from the British, and not to fight them," declares another.

"Give us a general who has a knowledge of the country's needs," implores a third. "Washington will remain without striking a blow for so long that we shall be too weak, finally, to ever strike it."

"Give us Gates as a leader," proclaimed the friends of that general, "and the country will be saved."

"Lee would be the man," cried still another faction who held that general in much esteem. "If Lee were only not a prisoner of the British."

And so it went, seeming to gather strength each day. Statesmen spoke publicly of the weakness, as they styled it, of Washington; and urged their fellow members in Congress to depose him.

"He has shown his unfitness to command the nation's forces from the beginning," they



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said. "But in nothing has it been more openly shown than in the campaign just closing. He has wasted a month in fruitless marching and countermarching."

To all but those who had the entire field of action in mind, this last seemed true. But to the few who knew the broad purpose of the great general it was the charge of gross ignorance. A month had been used, indeed, but it had not been wasted. Away in northern New York the powerful army of Burgoyne had slowly moved southward, driving the Americans before it through the wilderness. Day after day the patriots had fallen back before the allied British, Hessians and Indians, and day after day they drew them further from their base. It had been the understanding between Howe and Burgoyne that the former was to make a rush upon Philadelphia, take it and then send a huge reinforcement to the aid of the latter. But Washington understood this and kept Howe so busily engaged that he could not afford to send any of his force to form the junction with his fellow general; and now, because of this failure, Burgoyne was facing a mass of New York



and New England troops with every prospect of defeat.

“It is shameful!” declared young Lafayette, in his broken English. “It is unjust and unfair! They do not understand, and yet they will not hold their peace.”

As far as could be seen, all this clamor had no effect on Washington; he calmly looked over the prospects before him, disdaining the petty natures which threw themselves in his way; and before long he saw an opportunity to strike a blow which might undo all that Howe had gained.

Ben Cooper and George Prentiss rode into the American camp on the Skippack Creek one afternoon early in October. They had come upon news of an important movement and were in haste to bring it to headquarters.

“A large body of the enemy have been sent against the Delaware River forts,” was their report; “and another, almost as large, is conveying provisions; the camp at Germantown is none too strongly manned.”

That very night the army was under arms and advancing upon Germantown, where



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Howe was encamped; Philadelphia, some miles away, was in charge of Cornwallis and another force. Four columns streamed through the October dusk along as many roads; two were to attack the enemy's center, the others were to leap upon either flank.

At dawn on the fourth of October, the onset was made; the columns consisting of Sullivan's, Wayne's and Conway's commands plunged at the enemy as the pickets sounded the alarm. A battalion of infantry and Musgrave's veteran regiment felt the lead and steel of Mad Anthony's men, who burned to avenge their defeat at Paoli; back went the British unable to steady themselves against the shock. But Musgrave threw himself and a few hundred men into Chew House, barricaded the doors and windows and prepared for defense. Musket and grape-shot tore holes in the British, still retreating in spite of the pleadings of General Howe, who had sprung from his bed when he heard the confusion of the flight.

But instead of leaving a small force to cope with Musgrave and his improvised fortress and following Howe, the American col-



umn came to a stand and spent the greater part of a half hour in the endeavor to take it. This delay gave the British time to collect themselves; and when the Americans did finally press on, they met with a determined resistance; also a dense fog settled upon everything and they could not recognize friend from foe; different detachments would come upon each other and begin a destructive fire which would do great harm before either learned the other's true quality. And finally, when a cannonade away in the rear was opened upon Musgrave's men in Chew House, the division under Wayne became panic stricken, thinking an enemy had gotten behind them. Headlong they fled, and in their flight encountered another brigade in the fog under the American general, Stephens, who took them for an attacking enemy, and also began to retreat. Then confusion sprang up everywhere, until seeing that it was useless to continue an enterprise so stricken with disorder, Washington, who had been in the heaviest of the fight, ordered a retreat, and the army disappeared in the fog with the cavalry, under the soldier-like Count Pulaski, covering its rear.



This spirited, but apparently unsuccessful dash upon the enemy was followed by excellent results. It taught the British that they could not be sure of their ground for a day at a time and so restricted their operations to a limited area about the city. But the enemies of the commander-in-chief did not, of course, take this view of the matter ; it was a new repulse, they said, and their clamor for his removal grew louder than before.

A few days later, the Hudson River forts, Clinton and Montgomery, fell before the wily attack of the enemy ; then Fort Constitution was abandoned, and the great waterway was open to the enemy as far as Albany. But Clinton neglected to take advantage of this opportunity to go to the aid of the fated Burgoyne ; the result was that, on October 17th, that general gave up his sword to Gates at Saratoga.

When this later news filtered through to the American camp it added fuel to the fires already so fiercely burning.

"There will scarcely be any holding them now," said Ben Cooper, as he discussed the matter with his friends. "Gates will be a



national hero, and the cries for him will be redoubled."

"They say that General Gates is so inflated by his success that he deemed it beneath him to make a report of his victory to the commander-in-chief."

"His victory, did you say, young gentleman?" spoke a heavy voice almost at the boy's elbow. "The victory of General Gates? Well, well ——" and here the words were lost in a laugh.

The army of Washington was at this time occupying a strong position among the wooded heights at Whitemarsh, some distance from Philadelphia; the afternoon was cold and the boys were clustered about a camp-fire in the shelter of a hill. At sound of the words and the jeering laugh that followed them, they turned curiously, and saw a short, stocky man in horseman's dress, standing near by. And as they turned he nodded his head good-naturedly and moved nearer to the fire.

"If it does not inconvenience you," he said, "I'll share a bit of the blaze with you, for I've had a cold, long ride, and I'm fair chilled through."



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The lads made room for him willingly enough ; he seated himself upon a log and spread his strong, short-fingered hands out to the black-tipped jets of light that leaped from the green wood.

“ The victory of General Gates, says you ! ” Again the man laughed and again he nodded his head. “ Ah, yes, yes, that’s what it will be called ; but, between us all, and in confidence, mind you, Gates had no more to do with the beating of Burgoyne than either one of you.”

“ You mean,” said Ben Cooper, “ that Schuyler prepared the way—roused the countryside—bore the hardships that went before and all that.”

The man nodded.

“ I see you understand that part of it, and, believe me, young gentlemen, it’s true as gospel. Schuyler wore his heart out trying to get men to stand to the cause ; he worked night and day breaking the British strength bit by bit, and when it was all ready for him to strike, Congress removes him and sends Gates.”

“ And it is because of this,” said Nat Brew-



ster, "that you say Gates had no more to do with it than either of us."

"That would be enough, indeed," answered the man in the riding dress. "But, as it happens, it is not at all the chief reason for what I say. We of the army of the north hated to see General Schuyler go, but if we had received a fighter in his place we would not have cared so much."

Ezra Prentiss regarded the speaker with interest.

"So," said he, "you are of the northern army."

"I am," said the man. "My name is Johnson Quinsey, and I come from the neighborhood of Fort Edward. It may interest you all to know," and again his good-natured smile went from one to another about the fire, "that I am the courier who brought General Gates' report to Congress."

There was a stir among his young listeners, and George Prentiss asked :

"Then, perhaps, you took part in the Saratoga fight?"

"That I did," replied the courier, his hands held out to the blaze, "that I did, young



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gentleman, and a tolerable fight it was. But Gates you hear of, only—Gates! Gates! they cry wherever I go. But it's naught but the plain truth when I repeat it; Gates had no more to do with the victory than either of you."

"But he directed the course of battle," said Nat Brewster.

But Johnson Quinsey held up one hand.

"It's a sore thing to say against an American leader," spoke he, "but he might as well—aye, much better—have stopped at home. Schuyler, like the honest high soul that he is, took him by the hand when he came—never a thought of jealousy had he in his mind for the man who was taking his place. But Gates, when he held a council of war, invited some inconsequential officers to take part; and General Schuyler was ignored."

A murmur went around among the boys.

"And when the fight began at Bemis Heights did our General Gates lead his men? No! such dangers he left to others. Like a fine gentleman he took his ease in his camp, well removed from the field. Arnold had to beg permission to begin the battle."



"A brilliant officer that General Arnold," said Nat, admiringly, and Johnson Quinsey nodded.

"There is none more able or daring in the whole army. A hard man he is, with a cruel eye and the temper of a fiend; but he wins battles that for others would be defeats. As it stands, he is the real victor of Saratoga, if you must pick any single man."

There was a short silence; then the man went on:

"The first fight shattered Burgoyne's force badly. Arnold had been in the thick of it, and knew this, and when morning came he once more besought Gates to let him advance. But Gates would not. He felt that he had a victory in his hands and his little spirit was vexed at what he thought interference. You should have seen him swell like a turkey cock and rear his head. His empty vanity maddened the other; I was close by and saw the red rage in Arnold's eyes. In a fury he demanded a pass to go to General Washington's camp; and, afraid of his genius, Gates gladly gave it to him."

"But he did not use it?"



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"No; I suppose calmer thought told him that it would not look well to leave the army in the face of the enemy, so he remained, though his command was given to General Lincoln. For two weeks he fretted and fumed, and for two weeks Gates preened himself like an empty-headed dandy. And when the second battle was raging, Arnold, burning to show his zeal and display the wrongs that had been done him, suddenly emerged from his tent, leaped upon a horse and dashed toward the place where the roar of the guns told him the engagement was the most desperate."

Here Johnson Quinsey grimaced and laughed.

"They say," he proceeded, "that Gates, as before, taking his ease in camp while others did the fighting, saw Arnold dash away, and filled with alarm, sent an aide speeding after him to forbid his taking part in the battle."

"But the aide did not overtake him, I'll warrant you," said George Prentiss, his eyes shining.

"He might as well have pursued the wind; Arnold rode his great brown horse 'Warren,'



and in a little while was careering through a sleet of bullets from friend and foe to reach his old command. In quiet times in camp General Arnold is no gentle officer ; but in the fight his men think him unbeatable. So when they saw him, though he had no right to command them, they shouted for joy ; he threw himself at their head and led them like a band of demons at the enemy. Nothing could stand before him ; he raged up and down the field like a madman, the British and Hessians flying before his plunging brigade as though its very aspect struck terror to their hearts. Rushing up to the very muzzles of the Hessians' muskets at a stockade, he drove them out, but fell with a shattered leg. And," here Johnson Quinsey laughed grimly, "General Gates' messenger came up to him, as his men were bearing him to the rear in a litter. But it was too late to do any harm. Arnold had already won the battle."

For quite some time the boys sat discussing the surrender of Burgoyne ; then a trooper came up, calling :

"Cooper ! Cooper ! To report to headquarters at once !"



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Ben arose.

"It'll be a cold night for the saddle," smiled he, "but then, we can't choose our weather."

He had departed, with a wave of his hand, and had proceeded some hundred yards or more upon his way, when he heard a step in the snow at his side; and glancing up, he recognized the courier, Johnson Quinsey.

"Your pardon," said the man, and in the rays of a near-by camp-fire, Ben noted an intent expression upon his face. "I heard you answer to the name of Cooper?"

"That," said Ben, "is my name."

"Benjamin Cooper?" The man's head bent a trifle nearer, as though to show the increase of his interest.

"The same," answered the boy.

There was a brief pause, then the man said:

"It is odd how chance guides one's footsteps, at times. When I approached that fire where you sat I had no thought of meeting with you, and yet it was the hope of seeing you, alone, that brought me to this encampment."



## CHAPTER XVI

### IN WHICH BEN MEETS A STRANGER AND HEARS OF THE INN WITH THE GREEN LIGHT

FOR a space after Johnson Quinsey spoke these surprising words, Ben remained looking at him, steadily, but in silence. At length he spoke :

“I am honored, indeed, Master Quinsey, to know that I am considered worthy of the trouble it must have cost you to get here.”

Johnson Quinsey waved his hand.

“Let us not start with any misunderstanding,” said he, with engaging candor. “The fact is, I did not know that such a person as yourself existed before two days ago. Another thing, it is a matter of business, and not yourself that brings me ; so you see there is no great honor attached to the matter.”

Ben laughed ; there was something about the courier’s blunt way of speech which he liked.

“Why, as to that,” said the boy, “of course I am vastly disappointed. But we’ll pass



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that by and come to the business without any parleying. I am wanted at headquarters."

Johnson Quinsey smacked his boot-leg smartly with his thick-stocked whip.

"For a lad," said he, "you have a clever knack of promptness. I noted that when you answered the call, and I was pleased with it." He stood gazing at the boy, reflectively. "But," he resumed, musingly, "I had no notion when I first heard your name that it was that of such a stripling."

"The stripling stage," said Ben, good-humoredly, "will pass if given time, Master Quinsey. And remember," smiling, "that years alone do not give wisdom."

"Well do I know that, young gentleman," said the other; "well indeed do I know it. I have seen them who are three times your years, and not once have they been spoken of as I have heard you spoken of."

"Ah," said Ben Cooper, "it's a grave pleasure to be well spoken of by distant friends. Walk along with me to headquarters."

"Ay, that it is," and the tone of the man's voice was slightly mocking. "That it is, my lad. But what if you should hear that you





*"I AM SUMMONED TO HEADQUARTERS"*







were ill spoken of, and that the distant ones were not friends? ”

“ In that case,” said Ben, promptly enough, “ I should say that it were all one. To have enemies speak evil of one is to show that one is at least worthy of their ill will.”

“ If all that I’ve heard,” said Johnson Quinsey, “ be taken at its face value, you are ill thought of, indeed, in certain circles. But,” and the man’s face grew grave and his tone lost its lightness, “ it was not mere ill speaking only that I marked. They fear you ; and where such as they fear, there is danger.”

“ For the person feared ? ” said Ben.

“ Exactly. And their arms are long, young gentleman, and their clutch is strong. They are not ones to be despised, these enemies of yours at York.”

“ At York ! ” said Ben. The Congress was now meeting there. His eyes took on a glint that the other noted immediately. It was that sparkle which comes with expectation.

“ No less a place,” said Johnson Quinsey. Then regarding the boy steadfastly, he con-



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tinued : " It may be that you could, if you so desired, name one or more of these."

" I fancy that I could name one at least," said Ben. " And, perhaps," returning the man's look, quietly, " there might be two whom I could select."

" Ah, yes, perhaps there might," said Johnson Quinsey, encouragingly. " And to venture so far ——"

" Tobias Hawkins," spoke Ben.

" Excellent," approved the man. " Once more."

" A long man with an evil smile ; his name is Sugden."

" Better than ever," applauded Johnson Quinsey. " It is something indeed to know two such as these, especially," with a nod of the head, " when they hold such thoughts as I've heard them express of you."

" But," said Ben, " there were some others, I believe, judging from your tone."

" A very few, but quite select enough to please any one," said the man. " You have no need to feel ashamed of the quality of the enemies you have made. A member of Congress or two, a colonel much thought of in



certain circles, and some gentlemen of note who are not openly connected with the affairs of the nation."

"They honor me too much," said Ben. "But," in another tone, "as you know, I am summoned to headquarters, and must not delay. At another time I will see you and speak with you on this subject."

"Another time may not come for many a day," said the man. "And then, doubtless, it would be too late. What I have to say must be said now if it's to do you any good, for I ride north at daylight to rejoin Gates."

Ben looked at the speaker inquiringly; the man's aspect was grave; indeed, he had all the appearance of one who bore sober tidings. After a little space, Johnson Quinsey resumed:

"To relate in detail all that has come to my knowledge would take more time than you now can give, and, perhaps, would be of no benefit either. So, then, I will tell you what I must tell, in a very few words." He laid his hand upon the boy's shoulder. "These men fear you for the things that you know, and to which you alone can testify.



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There is a plot which is intended to place you in their power. What it is I do not know. But its workings will be secret, and the lure will be one totally unexpected by you."

"There are many such just now," said Ben, bitterly. "Indeed, Master Quinsey, those given to plotting seem to exceed those willing to fight."

"Do you know any one of the name of Seaforth?" asked Johnson Quinsey.

"I do," said Ben. "A young fellow of my own age, and a courier much used by headquarters."

"Ah, I see!" The man looked at him with sober eyes. "Well, Master Cooper, take care of this young Seaforth, for he is somehow engaged with your enemies. Another thing: Do the words 'Crossed keys' suggest anything to you?"

Ben shook his head.

"In some way they, also, are to play their parts, though just how is more than I can say. However, young gentleman, beware of Seaforth and of anything having to do with 'crossed keys.' More than that I cannot tell



you, and in parting I can only wish you luck."

Ben grasped the courier's outstretched hand.

"I thank you," he said, gratefully. "I understand very well that harm is meditated, for these men have attempted such before; but how they propose to set about it this time is more than I can imagine. However, Master Quinsey, I will keep Seaforth in mind and also the 'crossed keys.' Perhaps they will be the beginning of a clearer understanding."

"I trust that it shall prove so," said the rider; "and now, good-bye."

With another hand-grasp the two parted, one walking off among the camp-fires, the other making his way toward headquarters.

Once at the latter place, Ben was greeted by a businesslike aide.

"Cooper," said he, "we are instructed to send a brace of couriers for special service at York. The man asked for is now absent, and I intend sending you in his place. The choice of a second horseman is left to him for some reason, and this privilege I will pass on to you. So select your man; your orders will be given you when you are ready to depart."



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"To-night?" asked Ben, his hand at a salute.

"At once," replied the officer, briefly.

In a half hour Ben Cooper and Paddy Burk were standing on the cold porch at headquarters, while their horses stamped in the snow. The bareheaded aide from the open doorway spoke to Ben :

"You are to report to the secretary of Congress ; what service you are to render he will be able to say."

With that Ben and his friend saluted and mounted ; then they sent their nags at a canter along the darkening road.

"It's no night to be taken away from a comfortable fire," shivered the Irish lad as he drew up the collar of his coat and pulled his hat down to protect him from the keen wind.

"Adventures are to be had at night, Paddy," laughed Ben. "Don't forget that."

"Why, then," said the other, "it's the truth you speak, so it is. A ruction is a fine thing at any time ; but at night—especially on a dark, cold night—there seems to be more enjoyment in it."

The horses' hoofs beat steadily upon the



frost-bound road ; mile after mile they put behind them ; the few houses to be met by the way were dark ; their inhabitants seemed deep in sleep.

“Faith,” said Paddy, after a long silence, “it’s a queer thing entirely to have a couple of gossoons ride all the way from Whitemarsh to York to, maybe, carry a parcel of letters somewhere else. Could they get no ready lads at their hands, sure ? ”

“Special service of some sort,” said Ben. “It can be nothing of any great haste, however, for it will take some little time for us to get there.”

They clung to the Lancaster road, and as raiding bodies of British were frequently seen upon this highway, the boys kept a watchful eye, and saw to it that their pistols were ready to hand. As the night wore on, it grew, if anything, colder ; the road seemed deserted save for themselves.

Ben had made up his mind to this, when suddenly he chanced to notice, some little distance to one side, a flicker of light. He was about to remark on its queerness when Paddy spoke :



"Hello! Is it a light I see there?"

"It is," said Ben.

"Why, then," spoke Paddy, "it's queer conduct it do be having, so it is. Do you mind the little jumps it gives, as though it were trying to call out to us?"

Ben's eyes were upon the light as his companion spoke, and he felt that Paddy had described the idea conveyed by the light exactly. It moved in short, rapid circles for a moment; then it would wave to and fro, and up and down.

"If it had a voice it would call to us," said Ben with a laugh. "I never saw anything so mutely eloquent. It must be a signal of some sort."

"The British!" whispered Paddy, his hand going to his pistol.

"It may be," said Ben. "And then it may not be." He slipped from his horse and handed his bridle to Paddy.

"Is it going over there you are?" asked the latter, surprise in his tone.

"Yes," said Ben. "It seems to me that this is something that should be looked into."

Then telling Paddy to remain where he was



until he called, Ben made his way through the darkness toward the light. This had now grown still and burned with a steadiness that showed that it was a lamp of some sort. Carefully Ben picked his way along a sort of cow path that branched off from the road, and in a very few minutes he came upon a huge fallen tree, against the trunk of which leaned a man holding a lantern in his hand. As Ben advanced toward him the man held up the light and chuckled.

"I thought you were not going to stop," said he. "But I see you were on the lookout."

"He who goes about with closed eyes on nights like these," spoke Ben, "will be like to run into danger."

"Dangers there be, and plenty," said the man. He placed his lantern upon the fallen tree and took a few steps up and down, swinging his arms. And as he stepped there came a sharp, clicking sound; glancing down Ben saw that the man wore a wooden leg, the top of which was shod with iron. "Danger there be and plenty," repeated the man with the wooden leg. "And that you'd find, sir, if you really went all the way to York."



Ben glanced sharply at the man.

"And what," asked he, "makes you think that I might be on my way there?"

The man paused in his walk and turned a face upon the lad, all agrin in the lamp-light.

"Let us not discuss the how or why of things," said he. "It is for us to do as we are bidden and question nothing, Master Seaforth."

Again Ben's eyes went to the man's face with more than usual sharpness.

"Seaforth!" was what shot through his mind. "That is the name of the man whom Johnson Quinsey bid me beware of, only a few hours ago."

To the other, however, he said:

"You have made something of a mistake, I think, sir. My name is not Seaforth."

The iron-shod point of the timber leg rang sharply upon the frozen ground. The owner of it waved his hand after the fashion of a man who concerns himself with nothing which does not immediately bear upon him.

"You were sent as a courier to York, were you not?" asked he.



Ben nodded.

“And you selected a certain one to accompany you, as requested?”

“Yes,” answered the boy.

“Then let your name be what you will,” said the one-legged man. “I have nothing to do with your likes and dislikes in such things. I was to meet you here, and I was to signal you. And then I was to see that your companion was not within ear-shot, after which I was to tell you that your stopping place shows a green light over the door. Once inside you are to ask for Master Bleekwood. He will tell you the rest.”

For a time Ben stood looking at the man; a score of questions were in his mind, but a natural caution even in the midst of his surprise prevented the asking of them. However, he ventured one:

“Why were not these instructions given me before I started?”

Again the man grinned; also he took his lantern as though about to move on.

“Perhaps,” said he, “you were not to be trusted. It sometimes happens, as you must know, if you are a person of any wide experi-



ence, that it does not do to make too complete a revelation of one's plans at first—even to those whom we know the best." He waved his lantern at Ben. "A good night—or morning whichever it may be—to you, young sir. It's over cold to be standing in the open. November nights are not like those of August." He stumped away a short distance, then turned and placed his hand to his mouth that his voice might carry only in the direction he desired. "Remember, there is to be a green light showing over the door; and you are to ask for Master Bleekwood."

Again he waved the lantern, and again he turned and went his way, the iron tip of the wooden leg ringing against the frozen ground.

In a few moments Ben had reached his horse and mounted; and in a few more he had imparted to Paddy what had passed. He had already informed the Irish lad concerning his conversation with Johnson Quinsey, and at this new cropping up of the name of Seaforth, Paddy was surprised.

"It's queer enough," he said, as they rode along, "to have one so quickly follow upon the heels of the other. 'Beware of a man



named Seaforth,' says one man ; and ' Your name is Seaforth,' says the other, for all the world as though he were expecting this same person."

" Which he was, in point of fact," said Ben. " He said he was sent to signal him, to say to him, privately, that he was to stop at a house which showed a green light above the door."

For an hour they rode steadily, discussing with interest this queer new turn of events.

" Green is an excellent color for a light," quoth Paddy, sagely, " but in this case, faith, it's little enough I like it. It's better for you if you take warning by what Master Quinsey said."

" He said nothing about green lights," smiled Ben.

" He would if he had thought of it," maintained Paddy.

And at his last word he noted Ben draw up close beside him and felt his grip upon his arm.

" Look—directly ahead," said Ben. " What do you see? "

" An inn," said Paddy.



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“ There is a light above the door,” and Ben’s grip tightened. “ What color is it ? ”

“ Green ! ” answered Paddy Burk, and he sat straight up in his saddle.



## CHAPTER XVII

### HOW BEN AND HIS FRIEND PAUSED AT "THE CROSSED KEYS"

FOR a space Ben Cooper and Paddy Burk sat their horses in the cold road, and stared at the house which showed the green light.

"Well," said Ben, "there it is! At least our one-legged friend was no dealer in untruths."

Paddy wagged his head.

"No," said he, "he was not. But sorra the one of me would trust much to him for all. I didn't see him, to be sure, but for all that, I take him to be a blackguard."

"It may be," said Ben, "that he is that, and perhaps worse than that. But," and there was a note in the boy's voice which his companion had come to know, "I rather fancy that there is considerable interest behind what he said; and perhaps we should not pass this place by without giving it a glance."

"There it is, then," said Paddy. "There it



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is before you. So take your glance and let us be off."

"A glance at the inside," smiled Ben. "There may be something under that green light which we should know about."

But Paddy Burk shook his head.

"Better leave it alone," spoke he.

"What," said Ben, in a tone of banter, "do you at last pass by a chance for a 'ruction'?"

"Faith, then," and Paddy slipped from his horse, "at a hint like that, it's not for my father's son to hang back. Come along, then; I'm with you to the end of it, whatever it brings us to."

But now it was Ben who showed the greatest caution. As he, too, dismounted, he said:

"It will be best, perhaps, for us to tie our horses at the roadside."

"Arrah, but you have the fine head on you, so you have," admired Paddy. "A good notion it is, for sorra the one of us knows how soon or how suddenly we'll be wanting them."

Accordingly the two horses were made fast to a tree near at hand; then the lads ad-



vanced toward the house with the green light.

It was a low stone structure with broad, small paned windows and a huge sloping porch. Directly over the door burned a lantern of green glass, and through the windows streamed the yellow illumination of candles. As they stepped upon the porch, the murmur of many voices came to their ears.

“They have a most excellent patronage for a place so situated,” spoke Paddy Burk, after a glance through one of the windows. “Sure a body would think a tavern upon a road like this would be lonely enough.”

Ben lifted the great wrought-iron latch and opened the door. The place was filled with a babble of voices; a knot of men sat at each table eating and drinking and talking loudly; a huge fire of logs blazed and roared in the chimney place; there was a bustle of serving men and women, and over all, the fat landlord beamed smilingly.

“A cold night, sir,” said this worthy, to Ben, with a little bow, “a cold night for the road, young gentleman.”

“Cold enough,” replied Ben, cheerily.



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“And your excellent fire is none amiss, landlord.”

“Bless you,” smiled the host, “you are not the first to find that out to-night, by a good bit, sir.”

“Quite a company,” said Ben, and as he spoke he surveyed the gathering curiously.

“Quite, sir,” answered the other, well pleased. “It taxes us to serve them all; but we are being paid for it in coin, so what matters a trifle of labor? At times like these when the Americans come down on us we are usually paid in notes,” and the landlord made a wry face. “And when it’s the British, they do not bother to pay at all.”

There was a short silence, then Ben said in a low voice :

“Perhaps, sir, you might have the acquaintance of a Master Bleekwood.”

The expression upon the host’s face changed instantly from one of careless good humor to one of acute interest.

“Ah, so it is you, then,” he said. “I am most pleased to see you, indeed.” Then lifting his voice he called, before Ben could prevent him :



“Master Bleekwood, a gentleman desires the favor of a word with you, sir.”

At the far end of the room a man in a brown velvet coat arose. He was tall and thin and had cadaverous cheeks and long hair, tied in the back and faintly powdered. He approached with hasty, nervous steps.

“Sir,” said he to Ben, “I am pleased to see you.”

Nothing behindhand, the lad replied :

“And I am glad to see you, Master Bleekwood. Indeed, I have had quite a deal of interest in you from the moment I first heard your name.”

“That,” said the man in the brown velvet coat, “is exceedingly kind of you.” His eyes went nervously about, as though he feared his words might be overheard. “But,” resumed he, “let us find a more secluded place; it is exceedingly annoying that there should be so many here just now.”

“How does it happen so?” asked Ben, as they went down the room, and took seats at a table which had been occupied by Master Bleekwood alone.

“People interested in our matters going



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to York to attend Congress," nodded the other.

"Ah," said Ben, wisely.

"I see you understand," said Bleekwood. Then, after a glance over the company, he went on: "It will be no great while, now, before we have the movement upon a most excellent footing. And when that is finally accomplished, the object of our labors will be accomplished shortly after."

"No doubt," said Ben, with the same air of knowledge. "Not the slightest doubt in the world."

The cadaverous Master Bleekwood coughed behind his hand.

"I am quite pleased to find you so very confident," said he. "I am delighted, in fact. You see," and he bent confidentially toward Ben, "I am not at all the sort of person to be engaged in this matter—least of all the matter of to-night. My nerves are not of the strongest, and the condition of things is quite a pressure upon them."

"I can understand that very well," said Ben, groping in the dark, but determined to go as far as he might in the matter.



"These are troublous times in more ways than one."

"Indeed, yes," said Master Bleekwood. "Indeed, yes, sir." His eyes wandered back to the spot where he had greeted Ben, and he added: "That is—ah—your friend, I take it?"

Ben glanced in the same direction as his companion and saw Paddy engaged in what seemed a most interesting conversation with the landlord.

"Yes," replied Ben, nodding, "that is my friend."

"He seems over young for one who has caused so much unrest," complained Master Bleekwood. "But," as he shook his head sadly, "one cannot go by ages in these strange times. Why, they say Lafayette himself is not yet twenty."

"No more than that, at the most," spoke Ben.

"And to think that one so youthful must have so much power invested in his personality," sighed the melancholy Bleekwood. "It's a most strange thing, sir, most strange."



"Lafayette, you mean, of course," said Ben.

"Eh? Oh, no, no! Your—ah—friend, yonder. He has told what he knows, to be sure; but that matters little. What is to be guarded against is his testimony, should any slip ever be made and the entire matter come to a—well—ah—public hearing."

"I see," said Ben.

"Master Hawkins is a most careful gentleman," spoke Bleekwood.

"Master Tobias Hawkins!"

"Yes. He is extraordinarily careful. He says the small things are the ones which usually wreck the largest enterprises."

"Perhaps there is much wisdom in that," spoke the lad, now more alert than ever.

"I dare say there is. But Master Hawkins finds many impediments in his path. Congress, or a part of it, is anxious enough to dispossess the commander-in-chief. But there are some steps which it will not countenance, and which must not be brought to its notice."

"To be sure," said the lad. "That I supposed taken for granted. The present affair now is ——" he paused, questioningly.



“Is one of them? Why, yes.” Master Bleekwood seemed very much troubled. “It is of that sort, I understand.” He paused a moment, and then once more leaned toward Ben, confidentially. “And this being the case, I am convinced that it should not have been entrusted to me.”

“Perhaps not,” said Ben.

“A person with stronger nerves, now,” said Master Bleekwood, “would have been a more fitting selection. It has sometimes occurred to me that I would scarcely be prepared to cope with a sudden emergency.”

For the first time Ben’s attention was caught by something in the man’s tone—a lurking something which did not at all agree with his words. Without appearing to do so, Ben looked more closely into the face of the other. Its drawn thinness, he now saw, was not the result of disease. The jaw was square and powerful; the eyes, which had seemed sunken, he now noted were merely overshadowed by more than usually high cheek bones.

“The coping with sudden emergencies is scarcely my best quality,” said the man, still



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in low-voiced confidence. "I am hardly what would be called a man of action."

Lurking in the eyes of the speaker as he said this was a glint of mockery, which did not escape the boy. And, as he caught it, the suspicion at once flashed through his mind:

"Is he playing with me? Is all that he has said mere pretense?"

But Bleekwood proceeded:

"It was Master Sugden who approached me first. He seemed to fancy me for the task, for some reason.

" 'A young gentleman of the name of Seaforth will ride the road to York on such and such a night,' said he to me. 'And there will bear him company another young gentleman of the name of Cooper.' "

Ben started at this, but covered the fact by making a pretense of turning slightly in his chair. Bleekwood went on:

" 'The matter is one to be kept secret,' said Sugden to me, 'for there are foolish prejudices abroad as to certain things. The youth Seaforth you may trust to do his share of what's going forward. And you will meet him and the—ah—other, at the Crossed Keys.' "



“The Crossed Keys!” echoed Ben, his eyes opening wide.

“Why, to be sure,” said the other. “The Crossed Keys Inn—where we sit at the present moment.”



## CHAPTER XVIII

### SHOWS HOW MOLLY HAYES AND A KETTLE OF SCALDING WATER PLAY THEIR PARTS

For a moment Ben Cooper was so startled that he could not speak, and his astonishment was as plain in his face as in his manner. It was perhaps fortunate for him that a turmoil in the room took Bleekwood's attention from him, otherwise he would have undoubtedly attracted that person's attention in a way that he would not have cared to do.

The turmoil grew louder, high voices became higher; the inn people were clustering about in a fright; but still Ben gave it no attention. His brain was so busy with some truths which had just dawned upon him, and for the time he knew nothing else.

"Beware of a man named Seaforth, and of the Crossed Keys," had been the warning of Johnson Quinsey. And within a very few hours afterward the lad had been mistaken for Seaforth, had been directed to a place which



turned out to be an inn called the "Crossed Keys," and Bleekwood, the man whom Seaforth was apparently to meet, had mistaken Paddy Burk for Ben himself.

"Now let me get it clear in my mind," was the boy's thought. "There is some sort of a plan against me by Hawkins and his confederates ; a part of this was heard in some chance way by Johnson Quinsey. This scout, Seaforth, is a friend to the enemies of General Washington ; and he was the man sent for to ride to York to-night ; of that I am confident. One other was to bear him company ; he was to have the selection of that other, and I am convinced that it was to have been I. But, as it chanced, he was gone when his orders came ; and by a still greater chance, I was selected in his place. And, now, here I am face to face with the agent of the plotters, if not one of them ; and he, not knowing Seaforth except by name, thinks I am he. And poor Paddy, who stands so innocently beyond there, is placed in the danger that should be mine."

But his attention was drawn from Paddy at that instant by an increase in the disturbance before mentioned. All eyes were turned in



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the direction of the uproar, and well they might, for never before was there so much noise by one person. It was a gigantic young man with an inflamed face and a reckless air; he seemed possessed by alternate spirits of destruction, mirth and combat. First he would lift a heavy oaken chair and dash it to pieces against the stout walls; then, as though highly amused at his own performance, he would burst into a gale of laughter; and a moment later, his humor changing, he would brandish his enormous fists in the faces of those nearest him and dare them to grapple or fisticuff with him. But all declined the invitation with much promptness, at which the young giant resumed his work of destruction once more.

Finally, unable to bear it longer, the landlord approached.

"What's this, sir?" demanded he with an air of assurance, which he, perhaps, was far from feeling. "Must you break up my furnishing, young gentleman? Has a madness come upon you that you should do the like? Have done, sir; have done at once."

The young giant glared at him; here at



length, so it seemed, was one who would oppose him.

"Ah, so you are there, are you, mine host of the Crossed Keys?" cried he, delighted at the prospect of having some one at whom to level his humor and perhaps receive his blows. "And so you object to my amusing myself, eh?"

"I object to your destroying my property, sir," said the host. "It is a wanton injustice to do such a thing in a peaceable house. Have done, sir. The damage already here will cost a pretty penny!"

"What, would so brawny a fellow as yourself cry out about an injustice?" demanded the giant. "Would you prefer to make a complaint of the tongue rather than one of the hand? Surely a fist like that of yours was made for brisker work than you do. Come then," and here he shattered another chair upon the oaken floor. "You will do something to prevent the like again, I'm sure."

"I am not given to the bandying of blows," said the landlord, who for all his bulk was soft and ill conditioned. "It is not my trade, sir;



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I ask you if you be a gentleman to cease your mad behavior."

And with this mild admonition, the host, seeing his obstreperous guest advancing toward him, retreated down the room in the direction of the table at which sat Ben Cooper and Master Bleekwood. The latter turned nervously to the boy, and said :

"One always meets with conduct such as this in a crowded inn. It is most unseemly and objectionable ; and its effect upon my weakened nervous state is ill, indeed."

As the landlord's retreat was a trifle hasty, the advance of the giant did not come up with him ; he had entered the kitchen and closed the door by the time his pursuer had covered half the distance, and so the huge young man leaned against a table and held forth as to cowardice.

"He who will not risk his great carcass in defense of his property is a poltroon," delivered he, loudly. "If any were to do the like by me, I'd fight him if I had but one leg to stand on."

As it chanced the table against which he leaned was that of Bleekwood and Ben ; and



as he continued to volley forth, the former touched him upon the arm and ventured mildly :

“ I ask your pardon, sir, but if you have no very serious objections would you select another leaning place ? ” And as the giant turned and glared down at him, he hastily continued as though in explanation : “ You see, your present attitude is somewhat interfering with my comfort, and as I am a person of no very robust health I must look to it that my comfort is not taken from me.”

“ Ah,” said the giant, “ and so you must look to your comfort, must you ? Well, Mr. Longshanks, I’ll see what I can do to aid you in that.” And with that he stretched out one huge hand, gripped Master Bleekwood and dragged him to his feet. “ Your comfort must not be interfered with, do you say, my gentleman ? ” demanded the giant. “ Ah, well, let us see what can be done to add to it, for one like you should be coddled, indeed.”

“ Sir,” spoke Master Bleekwood, not making a move in his captor’s grasp, “ this is most undignified. Release your grasp upon my shoulder, I beg of you.”



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“Not until you have asked my pardon upon your knees,” said the giant. “I feel, good sir, that I have been most grossly insulted, and if this is not ——”

Suddenly Master Bleekwood’s whole aspect changed ; with a tremendous wrench he freed himself from the grasp of the other, and with a deftness that could only have been gained by long experience, he spun about and planted a half dozen short, powerful blows upon the man’s face. With the blood streaming from mouth and nose, and roaring with pain, the young giant steadied himself for a rush. But before he could make a move a door behind him opened, and a strong girl with red hair and a freckled, good-looking face stepped into the room.

“Gintlemen, gintlemen !” she cried, with a brogue as thick as Paddy Burk’s own, “will you give over your noise ? Sure, how in the world can a poor wounded officer on his way home to his ould father get a wink of sleep if you go on like this ? Is it a bedlam instead of a decent inn that we’ve got into ?” Then her quick, bright eye noting that the giant was responsible for most of the turmoil, she



marched sturdily to his side. "Young gintleman," she continued, "will you close your mouth and give over your great talk? Is it do harm by your noise to a soldier, who got his hurts in his country's cause, you'd be doing?"

The young man turned his inflamed face upon her.

"Take yourself off, you kitchen wench," he growled. "Hold your tongue, while I grind the bones of yon pretty gentleman."

But the freckle-faced lass was not to be daunted by a savage tone of voice.

"Is it me you call a kitchen wench?" she demanded, her arms akimbo. "And I'm to hold my tongue as well, am I? Well, sir, I'll not do that, but," and with a swift movement she suited the action to the words, "I'll take hold of your ear for you, you villain of the world."

Taken aback, the giant glowered.

"Let go, you virago!" he shouted.

"Sit down!" ordered she, shoving him into a chair. "And stay there! Faith, it's ashamed of yourself you ought to be, to be after raising such a pother about the place."



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Keep quiet now, for if it's again I have to come out to you, it's the back of my hand I'll give you, so it is."

And with that and a whisk of her short skirts she was gone. And as she departed the landlord reappeared armed with a stout staff and backed by a number of his ablest waiters and hostlers, also armed. But the blows of Master Bleekwood, and the fearless front of the Irish girl had had their effect upon the giant, for he kept his chair quietly enough ; what remained of his humor was vented in a low muttering, the purport of which was not intelligible.

And after things were fairly quiet once more, Ben Cooper spoke to Bleekwood.

"It were a thousand pities, sir, that your health is not what it should be. Otherwise you would be able to resent such affronts as that fellow put upon you."

The lad spoke drily ; there was a suspicion of mockery in his eyes.

"Why, as for that," said the man, "I have often thought that health is a thing greatly to be desired. But it is a boon not meant for me, that I sadly fear. If I were possessed of



it, I might be able to do some little thing to protect myself; but as it is——” and he shook his head and sighed.

This, then, was a favorite pose of the melancholy Bleekwood; he desired to seem backward in any matter requiring physical effort, and a nervous weakling in things calling for courage.

“But,” thought the lad who sat near him, “he is a pretty fighter enough. Indeed, I would say that it would go extremely hard with any but the best who faced him.”

“It were well that I could provide myself with a half dozen strong fellows to-night, so that there might be no missing the point of our efforts,” said Bleekwood.

“Ah; and so there are some others?” said Ben.

“To be sure. It would require one much more stalwart than I to venture upon a matter of this sort, alone. No, no! I can plan and I can direct others as to what to do; but to engage in the matter in other ways—no!”

“Master Hawkins is not here, by any chance?” said Ben, with a studied carelessness.



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The cadaverous one shook his head.

"No," said he, "he remains at York."

"And Master Sugden?"

"He is also there. Ah," regretfully, "they have the skilled portions of the work to do, and while I try not to envy them, I cannot help a slight feeling somewhat akin to it. The Marquis," in a dreamy sort of way, "makes a splendid companion."

"The Marquis?" questioned Ben.

"The Marquis de Lafayette, that is." Master Bleekwood clasped his hands behind his head and fixed his eyes upon the ceiling; and his aspect was that of one who sees pleasant things. "A splendid companion, indeed," he went on. "So much of the spirit of youth, so much dash and enterprise and the desire for adventure and experience."

"He is with Tobias Hawkins, then?—and Master Sugden?"

"At York," replied Bleekwood. "At York. The Marquis is no idiot. He has been here long enough to see how matters stand. Youth seeks success, not failure. And Washington is not the winning general."

"Ah," said Ben Cooper.



His eyes went about the room, seeking Paddy; but the Irish lad was nowhere to be seen. Indeed, now that he thought about the matter, he had not seen his friend since a few moments before the now subdued giant had begun his destruction of the furniture.

"I don't see my friend," said he to the man opposite him.

Bleekwood took his eyes from the ceiling. "There were one or two of my fellows close at hand a few minutes ago, and I signaled them that he was the person they were waiting for. I rather think," languidly glancing here and there, "that they have managed to draw him away somewhere."

With the full knowledge strong upon him as to what this meant, Ben Cooper was startled. But he did not permit it to be seen.

"You were speaking of the Marquis," said he, insinuatingly. "But, to be candid, I do not see just why he should be bothered about. He is but a boy—he has no experience as a soldier. If Master Hawkins desires to attract officers from Washington's army, why does he not make an effort upon Greene, or Sterling, or Wayne?"



But Bleekwood waved one long, thin hand.

"Greene and Wayne and Sterling are all very well," said he. "Most excellent generals, every one. But we are not seeking generals, my dear sir. No, no! far from it. We have generals a-plenty. What is required is the influence that will count across the sea."

"Across the sea?" said Ben.

"In France, to be more explicit. Master Silas Dean and Master Benjamin Franklin have done much to arouse interest there in the American cause. And now that a great victory has been won at Saratoga, France will see her way clear to taking definite steps in the matter. If the French king sends over a fleet and an army, which he will now no doubt do, his stated preference to Congress as to what leader his commander shall deal with will have a powerful bearing upon Congress."

"And Master Hawkins thinks that to win Lafayette to his side will turn the favor of France toward General Gates?"

"He has some such notion—and a most excellent one it is, I think."

"But the Marquis is not in the king's good



graces. He ran away here to America against the king's wishes."

"The king was forced to forbid his going because of political reasons. But, secretly, he was delighted when he made safely away; for France desired some one to overlook conditions here and speak the truth concerning them. Another thing, the gallant conduct of the Marquis in sacrificing everything to take up the cause of liberty aroused great enthusiasm in Paris. They rave over him; the queen and the other great ladies sent him offerings of their admiration. Lafayette is but a lad, it's true," spoke Bleekwood, "but that faction which holds his support will have a heavy advantage."

"Master Hawkins is a far-seeing man," said Ben, thoughtfully. "There are few points in the game that escape him."

"There are none," claimed the cadaverous Bleekwood, in high admiration. "He misses nothing."

And no sooner had these words been uttered than there again came a great noise from somewhere within the inn. Voices were lifted, steel clashed upon steel, and footsteps rushed



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to and fro. Thoughts of Paddy came to Ben, and he leaped up, drawing his pistol. But the shouts changed in tone, the blows ceased; but the rushing footsteps increased; then a door was flung open and a half dozen rough looking fellows, swords in hand, came pouring into the public room, cries of fear upon their lips. Behind them, her blue eyes shining with indignation and bearing a huge kettle of scalding water in her hands, was the red-haired Irish lass who had subdued the roystering giant a short time before.

"Out with you, you thieves," cried this redoubtable person; "out upon you! Is it kill a decent boy you'd be doing? Out of my reach now, or I'll scald the dirty hides off every one of you. Arrah, don't be threatening me now, for sorra the bit is Molly Hayes afraid of your bodkins, you blackguards. Go along now, or I'll dash every drop I have here into your ugly faces."

And as she stood there in the doorway, the steaming vessel held aloft, fronting the scowling men, Ben, to his great relief, saw peering over her shoulder the grinning face of Paddy Burk.



## CHAPTER XIX

### IN WHICH BEN RECEIVES A LETTER AND RIDES TOWARD YORK

FOR a moment it seemed as though the group of ruffians might take heart and fly at Molly Hayes, despite the scalding reception it was in her power to give them. But before they could fully make up their minds, the landlord and his fellows hurried up.

“What’s to do now?” demanded the worthy host, bewildered at this fresh outbreak. “Is the house never to be at rest? How, sirs,” to the men, “with your swords out—and at a woman. For shame! And you, mistress,” to the girl, “will nothing do but flourishing one of my coppers in the faces of my guests?”

“Your guests!” The girl put the vessel upon the floor, and wiped her arms with her apron. “And pretty guests they are for any one to have around about them.” She pointed to the room which she had just left. “Upon a bed there is the lieutenant, as you know,



and there I sits by his side, giving him his medicine and his small bite to eat. And then open bursts the window like a thunderbolt and into the room they leaped, their swords in their hands, like a lot of robbers."

"We'd never have bothered you if it hadn't been for him," and one of the men pointed at Paddy, who still stood all agrin behind the girl.

"Take shame for you, a parcel of thieves, each with a sword in his fist, all after the life of one poor boy. No wonder he jumped through the window into the room to get away from you, and small blame to him."

But diplomatically the landlord, without any inquiries into the cause of the outbreak, soothed everybody; the result was that the men put up their weapons and grumblingly took seats at a table far down the room, while Molly Hayes and Paddy Burk disappeared into the room from which they had emerged a few moments before.

The cadaverous Master Bleekwood had regarded this scene with scornful eyes.

"The clumsy rascals," he now said to Ben, "they have ruined their chances. I might



have expected such." He arose to his feet. "Do you," said he, "try and quiet any suspicions which your friend may have; I will have a quiet word with these fellows of mine."

Ben sat at the table trying to collect his thoughts which had been badly scattered by the events of the last few moments; then, more by chance than anything else, he saw the door which had closed in Paddy Burk open a trifle and a hand beckon him into the room beyond. He went to the door and passed through; Paddy Burk immediately closed it behind him.

"Why, then," said Paddy, and his face had lost none of the grin of a short time before, "why, then, this is the great night entirely. Did you have a fair view of it all?"

"Yes, I think so," replied Ben. "But, tell me, how did it come about?"

"As I were standing watching the landlord and the rampaging fellow a while back," said Paddy, "a gossoon comes up to me and begins a bit of a discussion. I'll never know how it came about, but soon we were head over ears in a quarrel; and then he invited me to the outside where we could settle the matter with-



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out further words. Out I goes with him, behind the inn ; but sorra a blow was struck before the rest of them made at me. So I slipped open the window nearest me and dove in with the lot of them after me. The rest, I think, you know already."

"And a-plenty it is to know, faith," said the voice of Molly Hayes. "Sure, it's fair ashamed of myself I am for making such a botheration as I have to-night. But a body must not allow himself to be imposed upon. And above all, the lieutenant must not be disturbed."

As the girl spoke Ben for the first time saw a pale young man, with a bandage about his head, propped up on a sort of couch. There was something familiar in his aspect, but Ben did not recognize him until he spoke.

"What," said he, "and have I changed so much, Cooper, that you do not remember me?"

"Lieutenant Claflin!" Ben advanced and took the wasted hand held out to him. "Why, can it be you, indeed?"

"All that's left of me," said Lieutenant Claflin with a wan smile. "I happened to



have been sent to the neighborhood of the Highland forts some little time ago ; and on the day the British made their attack, I was at Fort Clinton."

" Were you badly hurt ? " asked Ben.

" It could have been worse," said Claflin. " But it was bad enough as it was. However, I am now on the mend, and Molly, here, is taking me home."

" Home ? " Ben looked puzzled.

" Ah, yes, of course, you have not heard ; but since the army of Lord Howe has been in the possession of Philadelphia, my father has changed his place of residence to the town of York."

" Many have done the like," said Ben Cooper. " My own father has been forced from his house at Germantown and is now at Reading." They discussed the situation for a time and then Ben said : " You must have suffered great hardship in the long journey across the Jerseys."

" Not so much as you might think," replied Lieutenant Claflin with a laugh. " Here's Molly, wife to a fine fellow who is a sergeant in the artillery, Hayes by name ; and she's



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stood between me and all the hard knocks I would otherwise have had."

"Arrah, then, sir," said Molly Hayes, "is it leaving you to die I'd be doing? And you with the young sister and old father you've so often told me about! Anybody could see by the way you speak of them, sir, that it's the world they think of you; and if you'd a-died what would they have done at all, at all?"

"Sure enough, Molly," said young Claflin, soberly; "sure enough. Well, they will have you to thank when we get to York."

"It's little enough they have to thank me for!" protested Molly. "Sure, anybody would have done the like."

"Well, nobody but you made any attempt at it," said Claflin. "You must know," and the speaker turned to Ben, "that Molly is a great girl."

"So I should think," laughed Ben, "after the few exhibitions of her prowess which I have witnessed to-night."

Molly laughed and flushed at this.

"Arrah, don't be judging me from that, young gentleman," she pleaded.



“No, indeed,” smiled Claflin, “subduing a bully and putting to flight a crew of murderous wretches like those a while ago are scarcely performances that will do her complete justice. Now at Fort Clinton, for example ——”

“Hush, lieutenant,” commanded young Mistress Hayes. But he never heard her.

“When the enemy had hemmed us in so that there was scarce time for the hindmost to make safely away, who remembered that there was a loaded cannon left unfired? Who was it that went back, in the peril of her very life, applied the match and discharged it in their very faces as they came rushing on, shouting in triumph? Who but Molly Hayes, herself?”

“The lieutenant is a kind-hearted young man,” Molly explained to Ben. “And he do be always giving more credit to people than is their due.”

“I can plainly see that you’re more than an ordinary person, Mistress Hayes,” smiled Ben, “and so I will not take even your own word against yourself.”

And so laughing and chatting they passed



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a half hour; at the end of this time Paddy Burk and Molly Hayes and Ben and Lieutenant Claflin became immersed in more momentous things.

"My father," the young officer had said, "does a great deal of entertaining, even at York."

This remark was brought out in his insisting that Ben make them a visit while in the town. And instantly upon hearing it, Ben's face took on an expression of much seriousness.

"In Philadelphia," said he, "all the notables flocked to your father's entertainments."

The lieutenant laughed.

"And they do so at York, if what I hear be so," said he.

From that moment Ben grew more and more thoughtful; it were as though he were revolving an important something in his mind. After a little the lieutenant noticed this.

"Hello," said he. "What is it?"

"I was just thinking," answered Ben, "of a small chain of incidents which happened to-night, and also of some larger things, which



took place some time ago, but which are intimately connected with them."

"I see."

"And," proceeded Ben Cooper, "I have been wondering if——"

"If—what?" inquired Claflin, as he paused.

"I scarcely think you will understand unless I tell you all that has happened," said Ben. "So if you will listen——"

"Go on," directed the young lieutenant.

So with that Ben began the story of Tobias Hawkins at the point where that gentleman's path had first crossed his own; step by step he followed it until he reached the doings of that very night. And when he had done the lieutenant drew a deep breath.

"Well," said he, in amazement, "this is indeed a tale."

"It is not done even yet," said Ben.

"I can see that," replied the other. "I can see that readily enough."

"The story of Tobias Hawkins is not yet finished," said Ben. "Nor will it ever be, to the satisfaction of true believers in liberty, at any rate—until several links are added to the chain by a hand other than his own."



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"You have some sort of a plan," cried the other, sitting more upright upon his couch. "What is it?"

"Listen," said Ben. And so, with their heads close together and their voices pitched low, they sat for the better part of another hour. And when they had finished, Lieutenant Claflin grasped Ben's hand.

"I'll do what I can," declared he. "And my father and sister will do the same. If success to your plan can be won by effort upon our parts, depend upon it that we will do our best."

"That is all I ask," said Ben.

After a few moments more the latter arose.

"We must make haste," said he. "Paddy and I are on our way to York now, and must lose no more time. However, I will see you before a great while."

And so with good-byes for the injured lieutenant and his nurse, Ben and the Irish lad made their way out by a rear door.

"It will be just as well," said Ben, "if we avoid the attention of Master Bleekwood and his friends. Our way is a long one, and we'll be the better for not having an enemy in our rear."



Their horses were found where they had tied them; they mounted silently and proceeded upon their way. Nothing further was encountered upon the road; and after a wearying ride they finally reached York to learn that their services were not in demand.

"A curt reception," said Ben, thoughtfully.

"It have a queer look, so it have," said Paddy, scratching his head.

"In that it agrees with many other things which we have encountered of late," spoke Ben Cooper. "And it agrees entirely with the idea I formed some time back regarding this summons."

"You mean ——"

"That we were never really wanted—here. It was Seaforth and I who were wanted, at the Crossed Keys—Seaforth the decoy, and I the victim."

As soon as they were sufficiently rested they returned to the American camp, and made their report. However, Ben said nothing as to what had happened upon the road, and warned Paddy to do likewise.

Not long after this the forts which guarded the passage of the Delaware fell before the



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assault of the British. A pressure was brought upon Washington to attack Philadelphia, which he resisted with all his might.

"Shall the army of the north alone win victories?" was the cry. "Can we not strike even a blow with the army of the Schuylkill? Give us a general who will fight."

With at least outward calm, Washington faced this fresh outburst against him. He knew that the British defenses were too powerful to be taken at that time, and he refused to dash his small force against their bristling lines.

"It would mean only destruction," said he, and the greater part of his officers agreed with him.

His enemies, always at work, about this time succeeded in altering the form of the Board of War—and most significant of all, General Gates was made president of it. Mifflin was also one of the five who composed the board, which had the direction of military affairs in its hands; and it was plain to be seen that these two were intended to be the master spirits of the war. At once the board began its work. Two inspector-generals were



appointed ; and one of these was Conway, who was given the rank of major-general, in the teeth of Washington's plainly expressed opinion as to the man's unfitness.

Seeing that nothing was to be gained by keeping the field in the dead of winter, Washington now prepared to hut his army at Valley Forge, about twenty miles from Philadelphia. At once another cry burst upon him.

"Why have we raised and officered an army?" was the burden of this complaint. "Its purpose is to protect us from our enemies. And to do this it should keep the field."

The brave heart of the commander-in-chief burned in his breast at this ; his gallant fellows were without shoes, blankets or clothing to protect them from the icy winds. Their tents were thin and gave them little shelter ; and to ask men so circumstanced to keep the field was heartless and inhuman. So in spite of the storm of protest, the ragged army took up its gloomy march through the snow to Valley Forge. Cold, bitter weather was upon them ; the naked feet of many left bloody foot-



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prints in the snow. And yet, while this suffering was being undergone, great quantities of clothing, shoes and woolen stockings were lying at intervals along distant roadsides, rotting for want of teams, supplied by those in charge of such things, to cart them where they were held in such pressing need. Washington's enemies were now in charge of such supplies, and this was another blow leveled at him—a blow calculated to break his high heart and cause him to throw up his commission.

Inch by inch the plotters had forced General Schuyler from his command in the north; successful there, they were now using the same methods upon Washington. But through it all he stood unflinching and unmoved save by the suffering of his soldiers. The depths of the conspirators' meanness was equaled only by the depths of his courage; the obstacles erected in his path, the pitfalls dug for his feet were meant for one whose patience and patriotism could be measured. But in a splendid soul like that of General Washington, these virtues are unmeasured; and so he passed on serene and unmoved, his calm eyes fixed steadily upon the future.



It was while the naked army shivered in the midst of that most rigorous of winters at Valley Forge that Ben Cooper one day received a letter. It read :

“Come at once. Everything now ready.”

A glance at the signature showed that it was “Claffin”; then instantly he went to headquarters and requested leave to visit York at once. As the young rider was possessed of the confidence of those in command, this was granted without delay. Immediately his horse was saddled and eagerly mounted; and away he went over the winter road.



## CHAPTER XX

### TELLS HOW LAFAYETTE ASTONISHED GENERAL GATES

THE Claflins occupied a fine old house overhung by giant elms; and in the drawing-room of this Ben was greeted by Lieutenant Claflin and his father.

"Pray you sit down and take the chill of the road out of your bones," said the old gentleman, placing a chair for the boy.

A fine fire of billets was roaring away in the fireplace; Ben sat down with the others, and in a very few moments their talk was all of the subject nearest their hearts.

"Such villainy!" said old Mr. Claflin. "I never dreamed of such."

"They have approached the point of it, at least," said the lieutenant. "As you told me that night at the Crossed Keys, an attempt is to be made to draw young Lafayette away from General Washington."

"You have learned something of this definitely, then?" asked Ben, eagerly.



"Yes. According to your plan I have used all my time since being here in convincing them that I am not averse to their views, and ——"

Old Mr. Claflin gestured his distaste.

"I would there had been another way of doing this," said he. "I have no liking for double dealing in any form."

"Nor I," said the young lieutenant. "But to deceive them was perhaps the only way to success."

"Without a doubt," said Ben. "Such men as these refuse to fight in the open, or in such a manner that one can deal them a hearty blow. One must adopt their own methods if they are to be fought at all."

"I suppose you are right," sighed old Mr. Claflin. "Fight fire with fire."

"They have come to consider us as sharing their views," spoke the lieutenant, "and have grown less and less averse to speaking their minds before us."

"The house is alive with them," said old Mr. Claflin. "And never such a crew of sordid conspirators did I encounter anywhere. They mask their desires, to be sure, behind a



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pretense that what they advocate is for the country's good. But," with a gesture of contempt, "not for a moment do they lose sight of their own personal ends."

"Lafayette has been offered an independent command," said Lieutenant Claflin. "An expedition is to be organized against Canada; if he will accept he is to be placed at the head of it, with General Conway second in command. According to their plans, the latter, by his superior experience and natural military talents, would soon assume the real command."

"I see."

"This is supposed to have two results. The Marquis will be drawn away from the immediate influence of Washington, and the favor shown him by those opposed to the commander-in-chief will bind him to them permanently."

Ben sat with his chin resting in his hand, his eyes staring into the fire.

"A separate command," said he, musingly. "And not only that, but a command that is to be pushed forward to immediate conquest. The conquering of Canada has been the



ambition of many of our generals. And to have an opportunity of doing what so fearless and able a soldier as Arnold failed to do, is a very great temptation."

"You think, then," quavered Mr. Claflin, "that Lafayette will not be strong enough to resist?"

Ben shook his head.

"No," said he, "I think just the reverse of that."

Lieutenant Claflin looked at Ben keenly.

"From your manner I would say that you know something that we do not know," said he.

Ben did not reply to this, but continued:

"If it were preferment Lafayette sought, he would have remained at home, for there all the honors he could desire were at his hand. No; his ambition is much higher than mere personal advantage; and the command of an army will not tempt him."

"He is to meet them here," said the young lieutenant. "They are to have a dinner, a private dinner—and then they are to spread their net."

"When is this to be?"



"To-night," said the other. "Lafayette is already arrived in York, I understand."

"It will be like the meeting of a band of low conspirators," said old Mr. Claflin, thumping the stick, which he always carried, upon the floor. "If I could, I would take them all, and pitch them into the road."

Lieutenant Claflin laughed.

"Patience, father, patience. That, though perhaps in another form, may come later."

That day and the next passed, not without great anxiety to the Claflins. The possible winning away of Lafayette from Washington and the consequent bestowal of the expected favor of France upon his enemies was a matter of great consequence to them, for they, indeed, had the welfare of the nation at heart. But Ben Cooper did not join in their nervous talk; he remained very calm and thoughtful, though as the time for the meeting of the conspirators drew nearer, he displayed an eagerness that was noticeable.

Old Mr. Claflin looked at the long table with its spotless napery, shining china and fine old silver plate; the candles burned in



high candlesticks at regular intervals, and a chair was placed for each expected guest.

"There is one for you," said he to Ben. "I thought you'd like to hear what goes forward."

"No, no," spoke Lieutenant Claflin, hastily. "That would be impossible; how could we explain the presence of a stranger at such a time as this?"

"Far easier to explain the presence of a stranger than to explain mine," laughed Ben. "You forget that my very good friends, Tobias Hawkins and Master Sugden, are both to be here. What would they say did they perceive me seated opposite them?"

Mr. Claflin struck his hands together.

"Why," said he in comical vexation, "I had forgotten that entirely. To be sure! What could I have been thinking of? You are, really, the very last person in the world whom they should find here."

However, the old gentleman had got it into his head that Ben should be a witness to the proceedings; and realizing that he could not show himself, he set about contriving a secret means of his seeing and hearing what took



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place. There was a small apartment adjoining the supper and reception rooms ; and over the communicating doors of each there was a narrow transom. These the old gentleman had opened and a thin curtain was drawn across them, making them the best possible place of observation.

Ben was at once placed in this room, and with a book and a candle by the fire, began to while away the time. No great space elapsed before the knocker sounded, telling him that some of the guests had arrived. At once he put out his candle, and sat in the semi-darkness beside the fire, waiting.

Several persons were shown into the reception room, and as the door closed behind the man servant who had admitted them, their voices came plainly to the ears of the waiting lad.

“ Br-r-r-r ! A cold enough night, Sugden.”

“ For all intents and purposes. But the season is none too cold for Price to make his way here from Phila ——”

“ Hush ! It will be just as well not to speak too loudly of such things.”

Ben noiselessly arose, mounted a chair, and



peered through the curtains at the transom. The two men stood before the fire, and their voices were pitched in a low key.

"It must have been something of importance to bring him all this distance in such weather," suggested Sugden.

"Howe has made a most excellent stroke," said Hawkins. Then, though Ben listened eagerly, the voice sank so low as to be almost unintelligible. "General Charles Lee is to be exchanged."

"What," said Sugden, "at this time? Surely not. Why, he is regarded as a military genius by the rebels."

Hawkins laughed lowly.

"He is regarded so—yes. But is he really such? Howe does not think so, at any rate."

"If the Americans but believe in him, that will be enough to give them heart. It should be Howe's plan to keep them plunged in their present discouragement as deeply as possible."

Again Tobias Hawkins laughed.

"Perhaps," said he, "General Howe has a more complete plan than you think. What



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would you say——” here he bent forward and whispered a few words in Sugden’s ear.

“What!” almost cried the latter gentleman.  
“Is it possible?”

“Price tells me that it is a fact.”

“Why, then, in that case, we can even lose in the little affair of to-night, and still do no great harm.”

“In the face of this news,” smiled Tobias Hawkins, “the armies of France can support the armies of Washington if they see fit. It will make little or no difference. But for all that, let us make doubly sure, and win over this young Frenchman, now that we have him so nearly in our hands. I have found, by long experience, that it is not good policy to miss a single point, even though one apparently does not need it.”

The conversation continued, but in so low a key as to escape Ben’s ear. However, in a short time the other guests began to arrive, and when Lafayette, bubbling over with boyish good nature, finally put in an appearance, they entered the supper room and were soon doing the most complete justice to Mr. Claf-  
lin’s supper.



“A better cook,” declared General Conway, “none could find in all Pennsylvania.”

“There is a scarcity of cooks in your country, to be sure,” said Lafayette, smilingly to General Gates. “But our good host,” bowing to that gentleman, “seems to have found one, at least.”

“After the camp, gentlemen,” said Mr. Claflin, “the food has an unaccustomed relish, that is all.”

An hour passed in laughter, toasting, jest and feasting. Young Lafayette seemed vastly delighted with everything; and more than once Ben, through the transom curtains, saw Conway and Gates exchange meaning smiles. Then by degrees the conversation assumed a more sober hue; the army, its condition and prospects became the subject.

“Gentlemen,” said General Gates, at length, “since Congress saw fit to appoint me the head of the Board of War, I have conceived, as you all know, a project which, if it can be carried out successfully, will strike terror to the hearts of our enemies and at one blow put them at the defense. I refer to the conquest of Canada.”



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A storm of approval greeted this.

"Gates! Gates!" was the cry. "A toast! A toast!"

But the general stayed them.

"We required a commander for this enterprise," said he; "a commander of spirit, of dash and judgment. We looked about for such a one, and we had not far to look."

Again came the clatter of approval; but once more Gates stopped them.

"There was but one such officer at hand," said the general, continuing, "and to him the command was offered. I believe in encouraging genius—though to repress it seems more the practice in this army. Too long has this brilliant young soldier of whom I speak," and his gaze went to Lafayette, "been held in the background. Knowing the past as some of us do," here his eyes went to Mifflin and Conway, "we realize the chagrin that must now fill the breast of one who seeks to keep all the glory for himself."

A thin hiss ran from lip to lip at this picture of official selfishness. Gates proceeded:

"The offer of the command of the Canadian



expedition was made the Marquis de Lafayette. And we now ask him whether he accepts or no."

Lafayette arose.

"I do accept," he said. "I accept with the utmost gratitude. The command is a most important one, and I shall do my utmost to bring it to success."

There was a chorus of cheers; the conspirators gathered about him, offering their congratulations.

"A toast!" cried a voice. "Gates! Gates! A toast."

This time a number of others took up the cry.

"A toast, Marquis, a toast!" they demanded.

All eyes went from Lafayette to Gates. It was plain that the latter was the person to be toasted; and he stood smilingly expectant. Lafayette lifted his hand.

"Gentlemen," said he, "I see by the clock that the time which I had to give this delightful occasion is more than passed. I must make the first stage of the journey back to Valley Forge before daybreak."



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"A toast! A toast!" cried the others.

"Very well," said Lafayette. "Charge your glasses, since you insist."

With a shout this was done; and all stood with eyes upon the youthful Frenchman.

"Gentlemen," said he, "I give you the commander-in-chief of the American army—General Washington!"

A silence—pall-like and complete, fell upon all; if a writing in letters of fire had appeared upon the wall their surprise could not have been more great. For a moment Lafayette stood regarding them, contempt plain in his eyes; then he placed his glass upon the table, and said to Gates:

"General, I am yours to command whenever my services are needed."

And with a formal salute, he turned and stalked from the room, leaving them speechless with surprise.



## CHAPTER XXI

### IN WHICH THE BATTLE OF MONMOUTH IS LOST AND WON

THE winter at Valley Forge was one of untold suffering. When stout old Baron Steuben, one of Frederick the Great's general officers, first saw the army of shoeless, naked and hungry men, he threw up his hands.

"Nefer," he cried, in his broken English, "haf I seen such before! Nefer! If an army was half so wretched in Europe they would run away—noddings could hold them."

But in time things grew more bearable. Little by little the higher souls in Congress made their way against the spirit of intrigue. The enemies of Washington, after their failure with Lafayette, relaxed their efforts. Mifflin resigned his post as head of the commissariat and Washington's tried friend, General Greene, succeeded him. Food and clothing began to be fairly plentiful; the spirits of the troops rose accordingly.

Baron Steuben also succeeded Conway as



inspector-general, and his constant labors on the drill ground soon began to bear fruit. From a wretched rabble, the regiments began to take on the aspect of discipline and training.

Gates also suddenly fell to some degree in the favor of his friends in Congress; and once more he was directed to journey north and take command of the army in that region.

The surrender of Burgoyne had been the cause of the French cabinet's concluding a treaty of alliance with the United States, and this in turn had been the means of strengthening Washington's hands in the manner mentioned above.

"It looks," said Ezra Prentiss, "as though the conspiracy were dead."

"With Gates, Conway and Mifflin all declining in favor," spoke his brother, George, "it has that appearance, surely."

Nat Brewster was also of a similar opinion; but Ben was not so sure. Only a little while before, General Charles Lee, for some time a prisoner in the hands of the British, had been exchanged for the English General Prescott, and when he saw this brilliant and erratic



soldier warmly greeted by Washington and his officers, Ben's heart somehow grew heavy with fear for the future.

What if Conway and Mifflin and Gates were out of favor? They were merely instruments in the hands of the British, through the machinations of Tobias Hawkins.

"And Hawkins is still able to plot," mused Ben. "And that he is somewhere plotting and laying his snares is sure, for he is not the one to give up." He paused for a little, staring straight before him, his mind in that curious state when it seems to have stopped working, retaining a single picture of a single thing. Then his thoughts began to flow again.

"And that conversation between Hawkins and Sugden at Claflin's that night! I would that I had heard more of it. They seemed to expect something from the exchange of General Lee. What, I wonder? Can it be possible that——" but this led to thoughts that could not be entertained, and so he banished the matter from his mind.

A council of war held in the camp early in May had concluded that no blow was to be



attempted against the British until some opportunity presented itself that would insure success. Then Howe was recalled and Sir Henry Clinton took command of the British army at Philadelphia; and not long after this signs were shown of an intention to evacuate the city.

New York was thought to be the point aimed at; Washington sent some brigades into the Jerseys to break bridges and otherwise harass Clinton, should this be the case, but the main body of his army remained in waiting to make sure of his enemy's movements.

It was on the eighteenth of June that the British began their movement to a point below Philadelphia; from there they crossed the Delaware into New Jersey. Immediately upon hearing this, Washington broke up his camp at Valley Forge; sent Arnold, whose wounded leg did not permit his taking the field, with a strong force to occupy the city, and then pushed forward in pursuit of the enemy.

The Americans crossed the Delaware a little later, not far from the point where they had crossed to attack the Hessians a year and



a half before. Clinton was so slow in his movements that Washington suspected him of desiring to get the American force into the level country, then, by a rapid march, gain the heights, and so take them at a disadvantage. Another council of war was held; General Lee was for holding aloof and merely annoying the enemy by detachments. As his military skill was highly regarded, he gained a majority of the officers to his way of thinking; and the command went forth that this style of warfare be begun. However, it was not at all in favor with the rank and file, and though they obeyed their officers readily enough, they were not at all backward in their criticisms.

“Are we a parcel of old women that we should be afraid to get near enough to the enemy to come to hand grasps with him?” asked a stalwart sergeant of artillery. “Ah, I wish, Molly,” to a red-haired, freckle-faced young woman, “that they had had you in the council instead of General Lee.”

“Why, then,” said Molly, whom Ben, who sat near by, at once recognized as the Molly Hayes he had seen perform so creditably at



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the Crossed Keys, "if I had it's after old Clinton we'd a-been long ago. Sure it's in the arms of our lads to give him and his redcoats a trouncing, so it is, and I'm for giving it to them while we have the chance."

"Bravo, Molly Pitcher," cried a soldier. "Good for you."

"I'm obliged to you for agreeing with me," said Molly, dropping the speaker a satirical courtesy. "But I'd thank you, soldier, not to call me out of my name, which is Molly Hayes, and not Molly Pitcher."

"Your pitcher, Molly," stated her husband, the sergeant of artillery, "is welcome enough when the lads are thirsty and you bring it to them full of cool water. So what harm if they do name you after it? It's proud you should be."

"Sorra the bit do I mind it," said Molly to Ben, a little later. "But it becomes a lady not to allow them too much familiarity, so it do."

Generals Wayne, Greene and Lafayette had all been of the same opinion as to the proper means of distressing the enemy. In spite of the confidently expressed opinions of Lee they





*"BRAVO, MOLLY PITCHER!"*







believed that the rear of the British should be attacked by a heavy force, while the main army should be held ready to give general battle. Washington held the same opinion and shortly afterward set about carrying it out. He was no longer in doubt as to Clinton's route; the British were on the road through Freehold, meaning to embark at Sandy Hook.

As Lee was opposed to all attack, Washington, at Lafayette's eager solicitation, gave command of the advance to that gallant young man.

"But," said the commander-in-chief, "the command is rightfully Lee's. However, if he has no objection, you may have it."

Ben carried the request to General Lee. The latter's face when he read the message was a study to the speculative eyes of the boy.

"Imbeciles!" muttered Lee, who was noted for his bluntness of speech as well as oddities of character. "But let them have their way."

He wrote a reply stating that he willingly relinquished command of the advance. Ben placed this in his belt, saluted and darted out to his horse. But he had barely gathered up



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the reins when he heard the ring of hoofs almost beside him, and glancing around he saw the strong face of Tobias Hawkins.

For a moment the man looked into the boy's face; and the boy returned the gaze steadily.

"Ah," said Hawkins, at last, "so I see you here, Master Cooper."

Ben nodded, smilingly.

"Are you surprised? Surely you knew that your plans at Rising Sun and at the Crossed Keys both failed."

A sour smile crossed the man's face, but his hard eyes did not smile.

"I don't think I quite understand," said he. "But, then, you are difficult to understand at best. However," and there was a low menace in his tone, "I may come to understand you yet. And, mayhap, the understanding is not far away."

Ben saluted smilingly, shook his rein and galloped away; but at some little distance he turned in his saddle and looked back. Hawkins had dismounted before General Lee's tent and was at that moment upon the point of entering. At this the lad caught his breath



sharply. The suspicions aroused by the words he had heard pass between Hawkins and Sugden at Claflin's returned to him with a rush.

"What if, after all, it should be so?" was his thought.

"What if——" but here another thought occurred to him. "It makes no difference just now, at any rate," he continued. "General Lafayette is to have command of the advance."

He delivered Lee's message at headquarters in all haste; but the delighted young Frenchman had scarcely rushed away to assume his post than a horseman dismounted before the tent of the commander-in-chief and was shown in. Ben was lingering about under instructions to wait, as there would probably be work for him; and he heard the rider announce:

"From General Lee."

Washington at once broke the seal; and as he read the paper, a cloud overspread his face, his heavy brows came together in a frown, and he turned to General Greene.

"Lee has altered his mind," said he.

"You don't mean that he now wants the



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command, after it's given to another?" asked the astonished Greene.

"Just so."

At this a quick shock seemed to strike at Ben Cooper's heart. If General Lee was a traitor—and the words of Hawkins made him think so in spite of himself—what an opportunity this was to play into the hands of the British; what an opportunity it was to deal the cause of liberty a blow from which it might never recover.

"It may be," was the lad's instant thought, "that Hawkins has had something to do with this change of mind on the part of General Lee. Irritated that his advice was not being followed, the general, who is notoriously testy, agreed to having Lafayette in command of the advance. But no sooner had I gone with this answer, than Hawkins arrived and pointed out that this course was a mistake for one in the pay of the British government, and so instantly Lee altered his mind."

"This situation," said General Washington, "is a most perplexing one. I do not see how I can agree to Lee's altered fancy without grievously wounding the feelings of Lafayette."



But it developed that this could be done without any difficulty. A sudden altering of Clinton's plans, which threw the weight of British power into the rear under Cornwallis, made it necessary for General Washington to send a reinforcement to his advance. The brigades of Varnum and Scott were sent under the headship of General Lee, and he, being senior officer, was in this way placed in command of the whole advance.

That night the British encamped near Monmouth Court House, while the Americans under Lee lay at Englishtown, five miles away. Washington and the main body were three miles to the rear of the advance.

At sundown Washington rode forward ; his practiced eye told him that the British position was an awkward one to attack ; but if they were allowed to proceed a dozen miles further their position would be stronger still, for the heights of Middletown would greatly favor them. In consequence he made up his mind to attack at dawn. His orders were given to Lee in the presence of officers.

" Make your disposition for an attack," said Washington. " Keep your men lying on



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their arms ; be ready for action at the shortest notice."

The commander-in-chief then rode back to the main body, and during the remainder of the night was busy with preparations for the coming struggle. At sunrise, Ben Cooper, who had remained during the night with the advance, brought news that the British were in motion. By another rider General Washington sent a command to Lee to advance and attack, saying that he was coming on rapidly to support him. Then the main army was ordered to discard its blankets, knapsacks and other heavy equipment so that its progress should not be retarded.

The Hessian commander, Knyphausen, had charge of the British advance, which included all the baggage. And in the early morning while he slowly made his way into the valley between Monmouth and Middletown, Clinton with the fighting men held the camp on the heights of Freehold. This body did not move from the latter position until after eight in the morning, when they also took up the line of march through Middletown.

It was a region covered by wood and morass,



and General Lee had no great opportunity to reconnoiter the enemy; seeing Clinton's army on its march, he told his officers it was only a detachment. Ordering Wayne with a body of infantry and a few pieces of artillery to skirmish in the rear, he set out with the remainder of his force to, as he said, head the detachment off. At the same time he sent a rider to Washington telling him of the movement and adding that he was confident of success.

The army under Washington was making excellent time; as they reached Freehold church a cannon boomed in the distance, telling them that the fight had opened. At once the command was given to quicken the advance. Washington, with his officers grouped about him, was giving his final instructions. Ben Cooper and the other young riders were within call, ready and eager to bear any messages that might need sending. The commander-in-chief had just finished his orders to Greene who was to push on with a division along a side road and so flank the enemy, when a farmer mounted upon a plough horse rode up, wild-eyed and scarcely able to speak.



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"They are retreating!" he cried.

"Who?" demanded some one.

"Our army; and the British are after them!"

Washington, who stood by the side of his great white horse, turned an angry face upon the man.

"What, sir," demanded he, "do you dare bring us a false report at such a time?"

"I'm telling the truth!" gasped the man, his hands tossing in protest. "See, there; he'll tell you the same."

As he spoke he pointed to a small man in an American uniform, who held a fife in his hand, and had at that moment dashed breathlessly up.

"All's lost," he said. "We've been driven back."

A swift command, and the fifer was in the custody of Nat Brewster and Ezra Prentiss.

"Don't let him speak to any one," was the order. "He might spread a panic among the men."

Washington mounted, and the officers spurred forward. In a little while a scattering of running men were met upon the road;



then small bodies. Finally complete commands were encountered. Some officers were now ordered forward to find out the meaning of the thing; dashing past Freehold Meeting House, Washington came upon Grayson's and Patton's regiments in full retreat and badly disordered. Then came other commands.

"Sir," demanded Washington of Colonel Shreve, who rode at the head of his own regiment, "is the entire advance party falling back?"

Colonel Shreve smiled significantly.

"General, I believe it is. And under the orders of General Lee."

"And," declared Major Howard of the same command, "I never saw the like. It's cowardice."

"We are running from a shadow," cried another officer, hotly. "The most of us never even caught sight of the enemy."

Though he had been close to Washington since the opening of the war, Ben Cooper had never seen him angry until now. As the remainder of the advance now came up, the commander-in-chief rode up to General Lee, who came with it.



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"General Lee, what is the meaning of this?" cried Washington, his face white with fury.

Lee flushed and seemed unable to answer.

"Can you not speak?" demanded Washington. "I desire to know the meaning of this disorder and confusion!"

Lee's naturally irascible nature here asserted itself, and he made a stinging reply.

"You asked for the command, sir," said Washington. "Why did you do so unless you desired to fight the enemy?"

For an instant it was upon Ben Cooper's tongue to ride forward and tell what he knew.

"But no, no," he said to himself. "I know but little, and am sure of nothing. I had best be silent."

Though he was deeply exasperated at the conduct of General Lee, Washington did not lose sight of the fact that the enemy were close upon him.

"They are only fifteen minutes away," reported George Prentiss who, from a height, had been observing them.

The place where Washington had stopped the retreat, as it happened, was highly favor-



able for a stand. With eagle glance, Washington saw this, and the command was posted upon a hill, the only approach to which was over a narrow causeway. To the left of this eminence, Stewart and Ramsey's batteries were planted in a woody covert. Upon another hill, there were two guns stationed under Colonel Oswald. With all the hurry and excitement of the moment, the different bodies of troops moved with the precision of machines.

When all was ready Washington once more rode up to Lee.

"Will you retain this command, sir?" he asked.

"It is all one to me, sir, where I command," replied Lee.

"I shall expect you to take proper measures for checking the enemy," said Washington.

"Your orders shall be obeyed," returned Lee. "I shall be the last to leave the ground."

The guns from the woods on the left and from the hilltop had begun to speak, and the British were brought to a halt. Washington rode back and brought on the main body,



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which he formed upon a hill with thick woods at its back and a swamp to the front. Sterling had the left wing and Greene the right.

This time the command of Lee fought stubbornly. Then, at last, he was obliged to fall back, which he did in an orderly manner upon the left.

Ben was with Greene's division upon the right, having been sent there with some orders. From this position he saw the batteries of General Sterling open upon the British and force them back ; there was a pause, then the enemy came driving upon the position of Greene. But here the artillery of Knox met them with its thunder. In the face of it the invaders came on ; smoke was ascending in choking clouds, but through it the red coats and gleaming brass and steel of the British could be seen. Their musket balls pattered among the artillerymen like rain, and suddenly Ben saw a stalwart sergeant throw up his hands and fall. There was a shriek ; a figure with streaming red hair rushed to his side and sank to her knees beside him.

" It's Sergeant Hayes that's down," reported one of the men.



"Take him to the rear," was the order.

"I'm not badly hurt, Molly," said Hayes to his wife. "So don't cry about me."

"You are sure?" said she.

"It's only a scratch," said the sergeant with a smile as he was placed on a litter.

"Another man, there, to Hayes' place," came the order.

As she stood watching the litter being borne to the rear Molly Hayes heard these words.

"What!" she cried, whirling about, "another man to that gun!" pointing to the piece at which her husband had fallen. "Faith, then, there's no need of it. That big-throated roarer is one of the family, so it is, and if one of us isn't able to attend to it, the other must."

And with that she seized a ramrod and thrust it into the smoking maw of the cannon; as brave as the bravest she worked away amid the musket shot of the British, never heeding them as they came plunging upon the battery.

"What a virago!" Ben heard a voice say some little distance in his rear, and turning swiftly in his saddle he recognized Tobias Hawkins.



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"I wish there were more like her," spoke the officer to whom the remark had been addressed. "And now, sir, let me again request you to go to the rear."

"I am sorry to have intruded," said Tobias Hawkins, as he turned his horse's head. "The fact is that I have a message of an important and private nature for an officer whom I expected to see here."

Here the British fell back before the deadly fire of Knox's guns; and Ben Cooper as he turned away had a last vision of Molly Hayes, her mass of red hair tossing in the wind, wildly cheering with the men; then the boy rode after Tobias Hawkins.

As it chanced the man had taken a direction across a stretch which had been only a short time ago swept by the fire of General Wayne's command which lay concealed in an orchard not far away. Before it was a command of British being drawn up as though preparing to make an attack. Ben glanced here and there, but there was no sign of the Americans.

"They must have retreated," thought the boy.

Hearing the hoof-beats in his rear, Hawkins



turned ; and an evil smile overspread his face at sight of Ben.

“ Once more,” said he, “ it is you.”

“ It is,” smiled Ben. “ I saw you back there by Knox’s battery, and heard what you said regarding a private message for a friend.”

“ Ah,” said Tobias Hawkins, “ you did ? ”

“ I did,” nodded the boy, “ and I rode after you to say that if the friend is General Lee you will find him somewhere on the left, as I saw him —— ”

He had just gotten this far when Hawkins drew a pistol and lifted it. But just then a sheeted volley leaped from the orchard and he sank to the ground. And as he did so, Ben Cooper’s horse reared and plunged ; the lad fell from the saddle and lay like one dead, while over him swept the charging division of Monckton with leveled bayonets to dislodge the command of General Wayne.

It was well toward noon next day when Ben Cooper was able to get upon his feet ; and then, surrounded by his anxious friends, he made his way to the scene of yesterday’s mishap.



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"Wayne must have been waiting for the British," said Ezra. "And as they charged just as you got in line, you had to take your chance. It's lucky you weren't killed."

Ben touched the bandage around his head and smiled.

"Did Wayne drive them back?" he asked.

"He did. And before much else could be done, darkness came on. We were all under arms at daybreak; but the enemy had gone—ran away in the night."

"Ran away!" Ben smiled once more. "From now on he'll be used to that. With the armies and fleets of France to aid him, General Washington will give him plenty of practice."

"What's that?" asked the Porcupine, his eyes upon a small group beside a gun.

There stood a cheering, laughing cluster of young officers; then there was Molly Hayes in the midst of them, standing at salute, while before her was General Washington himself. The boys approached through the lines of men who, with litters, were bearing off the dead from the field, and were just in time to hear the commander-in-chief say:

"Your bravery, Mistress Hayes, was equal



to that of any man in the army. You served your gun gallantly, and in the name of Congress I thank you. My only regret is that I can do nothing more."

"You can, general, asthore," cried a voice from the rear, a voice which Ben at once recognized as that of Paddy Burk. "Now that her husband is wounded, make her a sergeant in his place."

The grave-faced commander-in-chief smiled at the suggestion.

"An excellent notion; and from this time on, Mistress Hayes, you are a sergeant in the service of the United States, with the pay of such and all the other things that such rank demands."

There was a chorus of cheers at this, and Molly Hayes, with cheeks stained crimson and eyes shining, once more saluted with proper military stiffness. And just then a litter holding a body came up and Ben, as he stepped aside to permit its passage, had a view of the face.

"She earned it," said Nat Brewster, who had heard the story of Molly's courage. "And she's deserved all she's got."



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Ben turned away from the litter, and a shudder ran through him. But, though he closed his eyes, he could not shut out the cold, white, dead face of Tobias Hawkins.

"There are more than she who have received what they deserved," said he, in a low voice.

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